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American Cinematographer

MAY 1998

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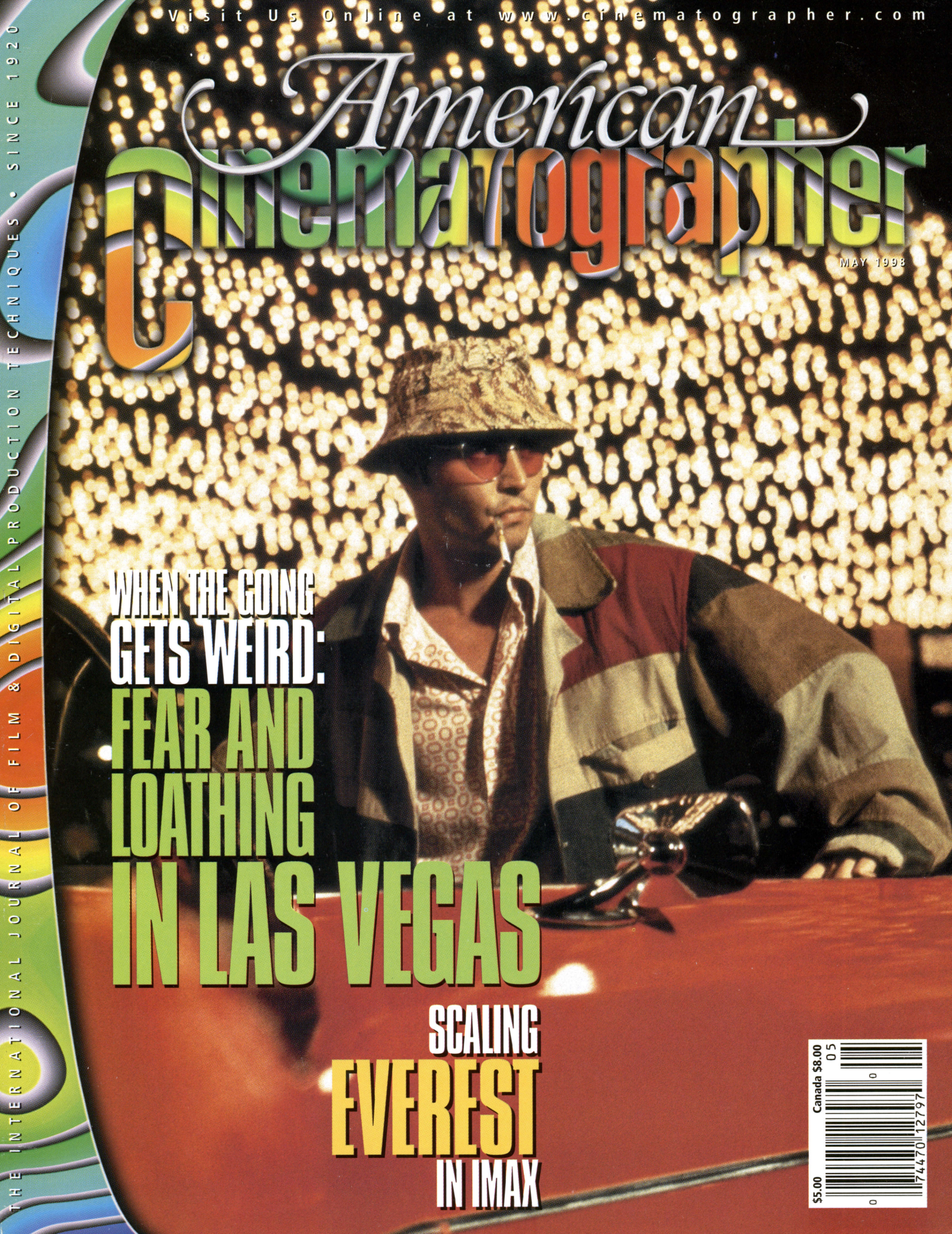

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Stephen Consentino

"The vest is a very important part of the system. It's a real personal thing. And with the new Master Series vest you can actually customize the set up — for your comfort level or for the demands of a specific shot. When I'm in the field I have the ability to adjust the vest as the day progresses ... looser ... tighter. If the shot requires me to be going in a certain direction, I can tighten one side for greater stability. The old vest was cumbersome. Now, I can actually adjust on the fly, with the rig on."

Kevin Braband

"I'm very happy with the new Master Series vest. Coarse and fine adjustment using the combination of Velcro and the new camlock ratchets is great. I adjust only on the cam-lock ratchets so I've never had velcro blow-out. No-tools adjustments are ace. I use the camlocks to 'ease the grip' while resting. This is a great idea. I never have a problem getting in and out of the vest. And it's very comfortable. They've increased travel on the bridge which is good. And improved the quick release straps which is great."

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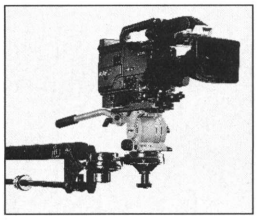
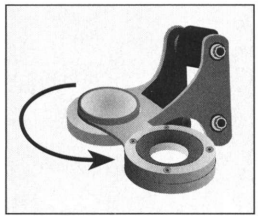
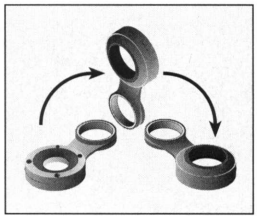


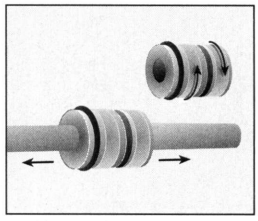
Offset Arm



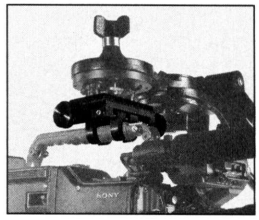
Invertible Bowl



Trim Weight



Underslinger



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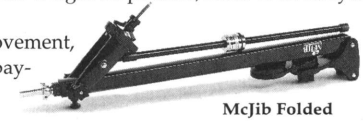

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On Our Cover:
"Gonzo journalist" Raoul Duke (Johnny Depp) confronts the ugly underside of the American Dream in the long-awaited screen version of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, directed by Terry Gilliam and photographed by Nicola Pecorini (photo by Peter Mountain, courtesy of Universal Pictures.)

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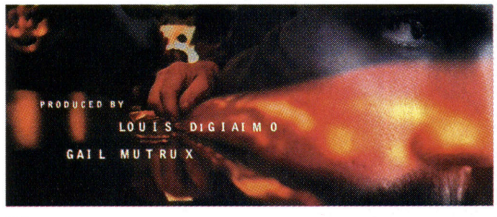

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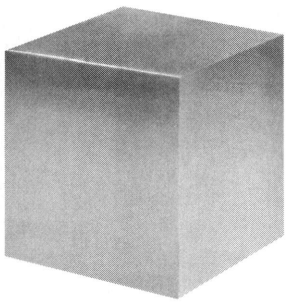
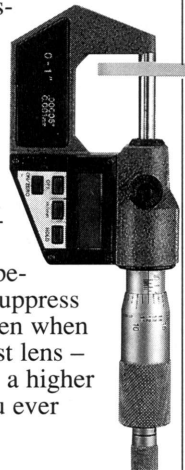


Schneider B+W filters are diamond cut from only the finest crystal-clear, water-white optical glass.

Every Schneider filter is diamond cut from the finest crystal-clear, water-white optical glass, which allows maximum light transmission. Then they are ground and polished to the same high-quality standards that have made Schneider lenses the finest in the world.

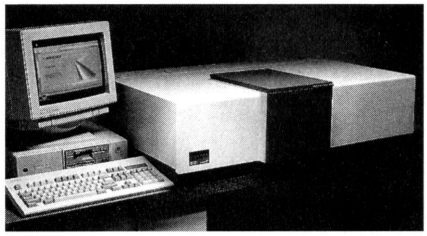
So, whether you're stacking filters or shooting in low light, if you want color saturation, special effects, or need to suppress glare or reflections – even when shooting with the longest lens – Schneider filters deliver a higher level of quality than you ever thought possible.



Guaranteed Consistency

While inconsistent filters wreak havoc on image quality and waste your latitude for photographic error, the absolutely predictable performance and durability of Schneider B+W filters allow you to shoot with total confidence.

We measure each filter's flatness and thickness with an interferometer, and check its exact color performance with a spectrophotometer, so we can guarantee precise continuity from your first to your fiftieth Schneider filter, and beyond. In fact, numerous inspections throughout the manufacturing process ensure that every Schneider filter meets our – and your – most critical demands... always with identical results.

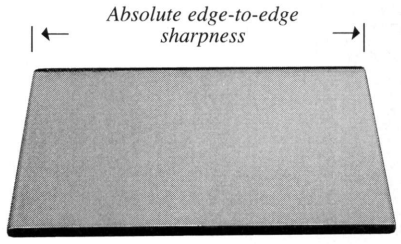


Spectrophotometer examination of every filter guarantees that Schneider B+W filters deliver the same matched performance every time. Superior manufacturing ensures plane-parallelism (the precise flatness and exact parallel relationship between front and back surfaces).

Increased Creative Control

By helping you produce the effect you want in-camera, Schneider filters put more creative control where it belongs – in your hands.

The crystal clarity and precise repeatability of Schneider filters help you get the shot you want the first time and every time, without frustrating "creative surprises." The result is less reliance on post-production correction, more great takes, and more raves at dailies.



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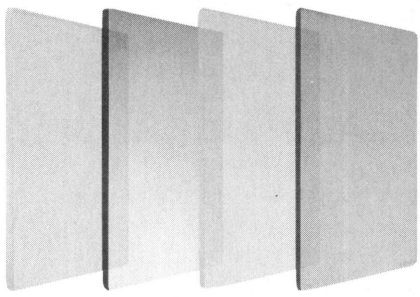

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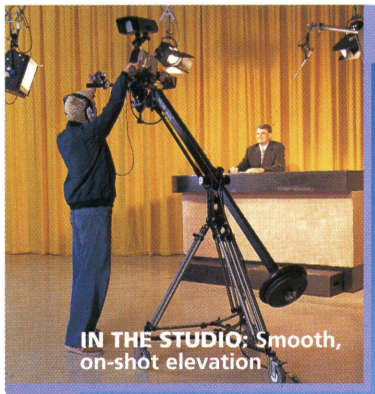

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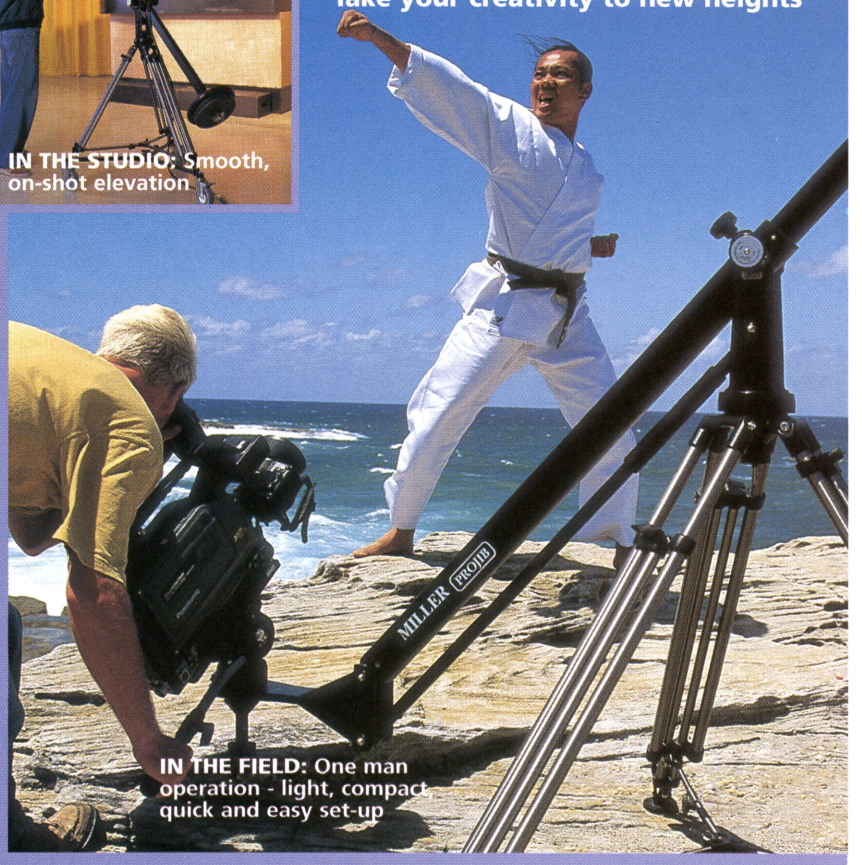

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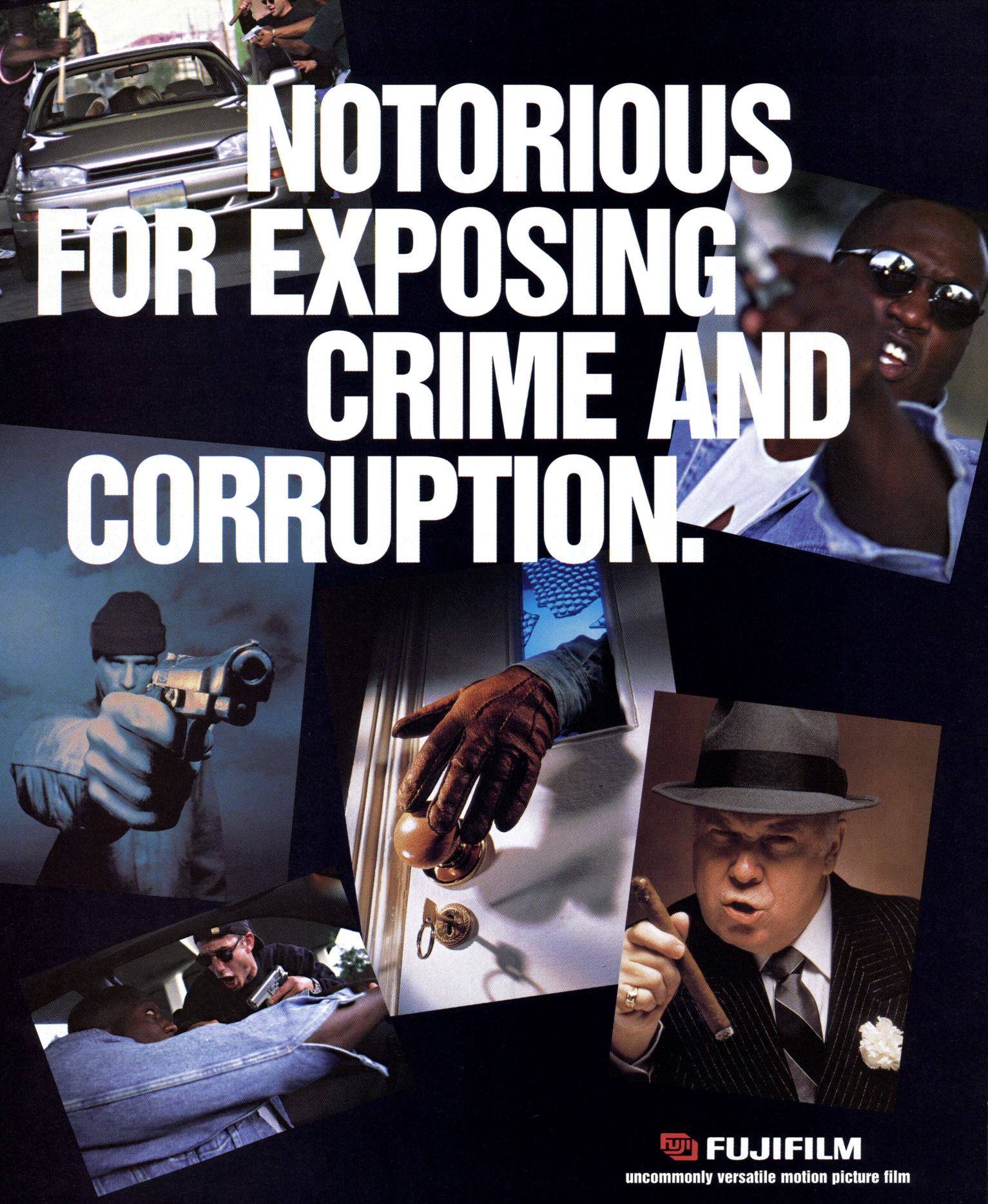

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SHAKES

...ADDED OR REMOVED

The "motion" in a motion picture can range from an earthquake measuring 7.5 on the Richter Scale to 40 miles of bad road. And it's up to the cinematographer to make everything look realistic. That's why Clairmont Camera has developed these three useful devices.

IMAGE SHAKER

We've taken state-of-the-art technology and applied it to the task of simulating a wide variety of "shake" effects — without moving the camera! Our innovative Image Shaker features two microprocessor-controlled actuators which "shake" a proprietary optical device in a variety of pre-programmed random routines. The Image Shaker is mounted in front of the prime lens (using standard 15mm Arriflex rods) and is effective with focal length lenses from 18mm to about 180mm. It can also be used on the longer end of certain zoom lenses.

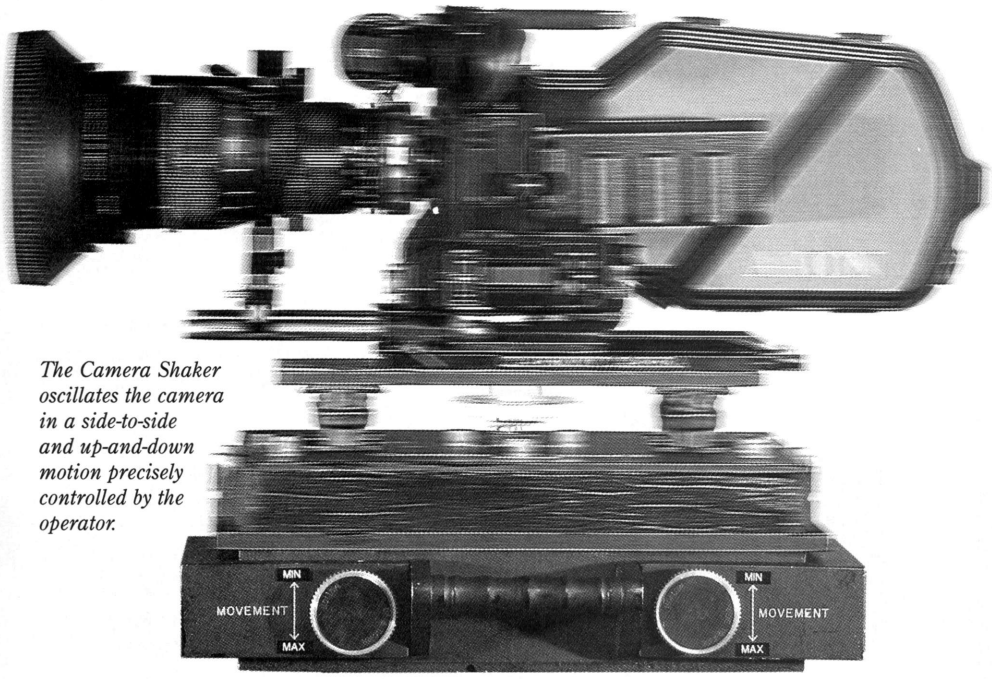
This compact device weighs only 9 lbs., and can actually be used in hand-held situations. With an optional remote cable it can be operated from a distance of up to 50 feet. And a built-in amplitude control also allows you to fade-in and fade-out of the desired effect! The handy control box features a backlit LCD display that is easy to read under day and night lighting conditions.

You can independently adjust both the X and Y axis motion to obtain the desired up-and-down or side-to-side "shake" —or any combination thereof. Anything is possible. And you can see it all through the eyepiece!

Because the Clairmont Image Shaker is relatively quiet, and won't shake the camera or lens, you can use it in a wide variety of applications. Moreover, you can get any kind of "shake" effect without having the expense of doing it in post. It's clearly the ideal solution for both the D.P. and the producer!

Clairmont Has 3 Special Devices To Create or Control Vibration!

Clairmont's exclusive microprocessor controlled Image Shaker does all the work while the camera operates in a normal, quiet manner.



The Camera Shaker oscillates the camera in a side-to-side and up-and-down motion precisely controlled by the operator.

CAMERA SHAKER

You've probably seen any number of gizmos used on the set to simulate movement. Drill motors with off-balance rods in the chuck are a prime example. The results are often laughable.

Clairmont's Camera Shaker is a tried-and-true device that mechanically oscillates the camera in a fully controllable dual axis "shake." You can independently vary the speed and intensity of both side-to-side and up-and-down motion.

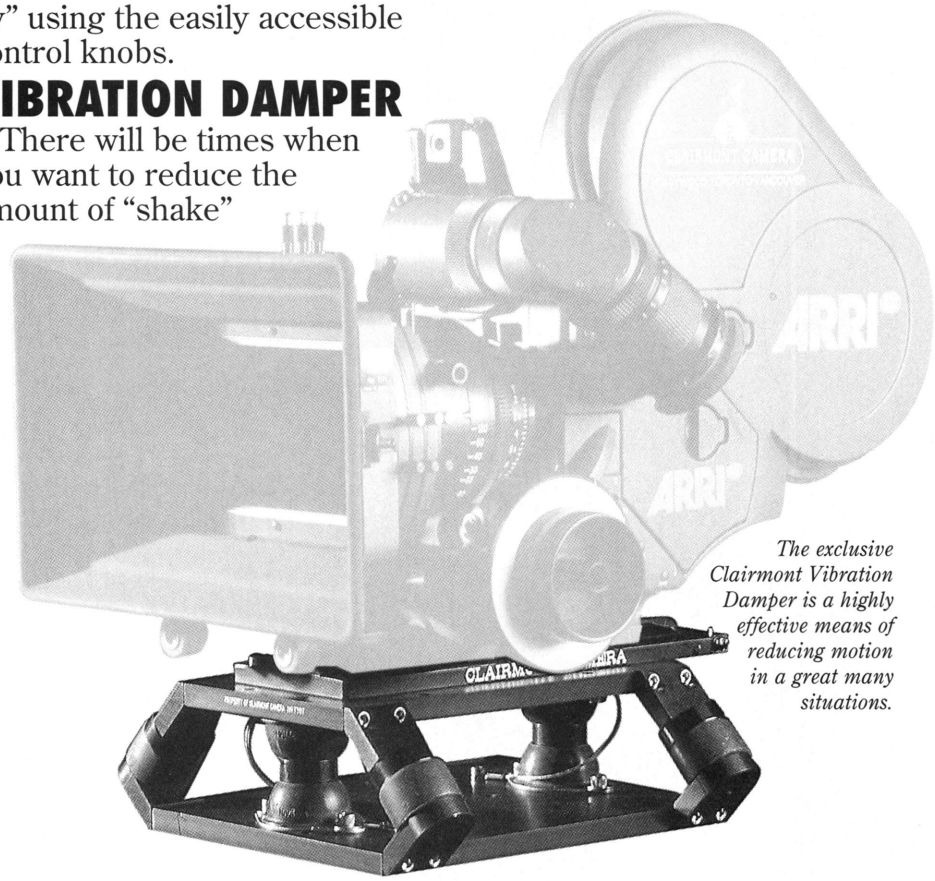
The rugged Camera Shaker operates off a 12-volt battery, with a cam-actuating electrical motor for each axis providing the necessary motion. There is a remote on/off controller, while adjustments to the movement can be set "on the fly" using the easily accessible control knobs.

VIBRATION DAMPER

There will be times when you want to reduce the amount of "shake" that shows up on camera. This typically occurs when cameras are mounted on any type of moving vehicle from a buckboard to a motorcycle.

To accomplish this, we've developed a special mount that works with both 35mm and 16mm cameras. It features a series of strategically placed elastomer vibration dampeners. And by "isolating" the camera from its mount, significant reductions in vibration can be achieved. Simple, but effective!

Your local Clairmont Camera representative will gladly give you any required technical or rental information on these handy tools of the trade.



The exclusive Clairmont Vibration Damper is a highly effective means of reducing motion in a great many situations.

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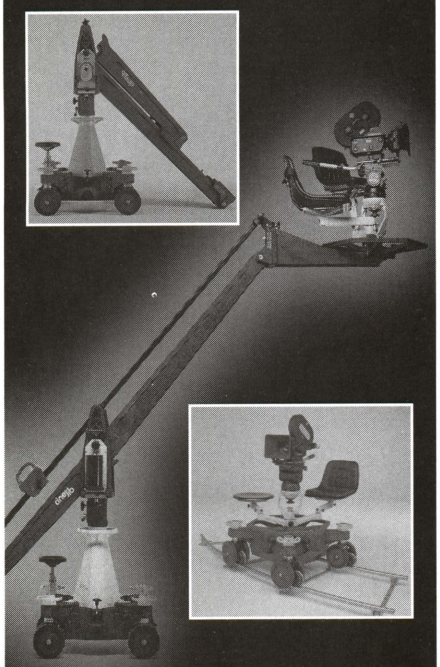

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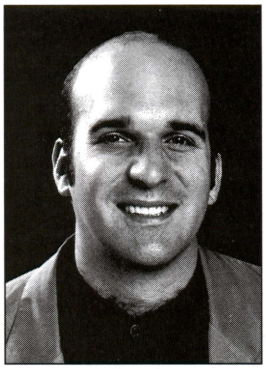

During my undergraduate days at Boston University, a dog-eared copy of Hunter S. Thompson's book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* served not only as a valuable primer on creative misbehavior (much to the chagrin of my dormitory's "resident assistants") but as an instructional guide to the limitless possibilities of the English language. Inspired by Thompson's vivid descriptions and endlessly inventive sentences, I began to see that nouns, verbs and adjectives could be combined in some truly fascinating ways. After landing the position of film editor for the school's student-run newspaper, the *Daily Free Press,* I soon began shamelessly aping my favorite author's trademark style, performing lurid feats of grammatical gymnastics for an increasingly beleaguered readership. Fortunately for all concerned, my "faux Thompson" phase was relatively short-lived.

At about this same time, I attended a screening of a new film by director Terry Gilliam, whose hilariously grotesque animations for the British television series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* — as well as his previous cinematic offerings — had elevated him to the status of a demigod within my circle of friends. I had high hopes as I strolled into a Beantown theater to view Gilliam's latest big-screen effort, and the auteur did not disappoint: his Orwellian satire *Brazil* still occupies a special niche on my list of favorite films.

Needless to say, if someone had told me then that Gilliam would one day direct the definitive screen version of Thompson's twisted tale, I would have been prompted to perform cartwheels of collegiate joy. I'm happy to report, however, that my advancing age hasn't managed to blunt my enthusiasm for the project, as my recent interviews with both Gilliam (see page 42) and director of photography Nicola Pecorini (page 30) will surely reveal.

This issue of *AC* also presents our comprehensive coverage of *Everest* (beginning on page 48), a truly memorable Imax expedition by MacGillivray Freeman Films. In our August 1995 edition, we detailed the team's preproduction experiments with a new, lighter-weight 15-perf/65mm camera; we are pleased to report that the intrepid filmmakers managed to overcome the peak's treacherous and life-threatening obstacles to bring back some magnificent, must-see footage.

Excellence was equally apparent in the television images honored at this year's ASC Awards ceremony, held on March 8 at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. Our profiles of this year's winners and nominees (page 58) capture their unflagging commitment and devotion to the cinematographer's art.

Of course, it is the wise director of photography who follows his work through the postproduction process, which is this month's special theme. In today's industry of rapid technological advances, a creative application of post techniques can help filmmakers produce some stunning results — whether the goal is transforming large-format 2-D images into 3-D jaw-droppers (page 84); conjuring up magical landscapes for fantastic narratives such as *Ma Vie En Rose* (page 88); or creating stunning title sequences for both film and television projects (page 92). Hopefully, our coverage of these cutting-edge methods will both enlighten and inform.

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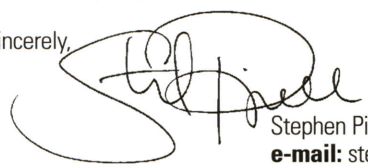

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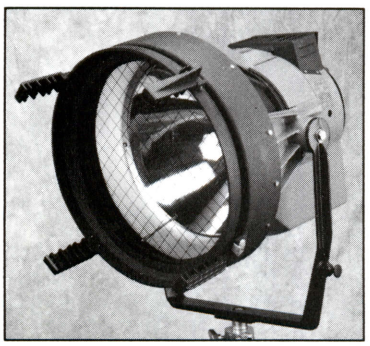
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Letters

An Extra 35mm of *Titanic*

I almost didn't go to see *Titanic* in 70mm; after having read James Cameron's account ["Captain of His Ship," *AC* Dec. '97], it didn't sound as though 70mm was worth an hour of fighting L.A. freeways. Having seen the film five times in 35mm, what was the point of seeing it in 70mm?

I'm glad I made the effort, because what I saw surprised me. It was obvious from the first frame that the grain was much more stable — that's to be expected. What really threw me was the profound difference in the composition of the images. Maybe it's only 10 percent more image area of the movie up on screen — added to the top or bottom of the image or split between — but for me that made a huge difference. Watching *Titanic* in 70mm has the odd feeling of watching a "restored" masterpiece like *Vertigo:* you know you've seen a particular scene many times before and you shouldn't be excited by seeing it again, but you are and don't exactly know why.

In *Titanic*'s 70mm print, the skin tones are sometimes almost like velvet, [Oscar winner Russell Carpenter, ASC] with a smoothness and stillness right out of a Georges de La Tour portrait. It's refreshing to see a cinematographer with the guts to keep the lens on the naked side and work with the light sources and controlled overexposure of the negative to achieve such flattering effects. This, of course, is a lot more work than putting the equivalent of a nylon stocking over the lens, but the results are clearly worth it — they give a new generation [of filmgoers] as good a glimpse as they're ever going to get of what old "silver" Technicolor prints were like in terms of snap and saturation.

The film's digital effects work is equally exalted in 70mm. The opening dissolve of the *Titanic* at Southampton gave me goosebumps. One is immediately struck by the detail in the background — the little digital people can be seen really clearly, and the imagery has a realism to it that isn't there in 35mm. In the first looking-down-from-the-sky shot of the *Titanic* at sea in the 35mm anamorphic prints, there are two narrow black lines on deck that turn slowly, like upright drill bits. I wondered if these lines were supposed to be smoke; in 70mm, they are clearly the foremast and the aftmast. I know very little about the special effects work, but I would suspect that the squeezing and unsqueezing process which goes into photographing and projecting an anamorphic print seems to compromise the digital effects in subtle ways.

To be fair, Paramount made its decision [about making 70mm prints] before the film was released and, fearing a disaster, probably tried to keep the financial risk to a minimum by ordering cheaper 35mm prints almost exclusively. When the time comes to re-release *Titanic* in theaters, I hope they will consider issuing more 70mm prints. If anything, this would give people an excuse to see the movie again. And if ever there was a film that can keep 70mm alive, *Titanic* is it.

— George Petersen
San Diego, CA

Next Month in *AC:*

Bulworth
Director: **Warren Beatty**
Cinematographer:
Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC

Godzilla
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Cinematographer: **Ueli Steiger**

The Truman Show
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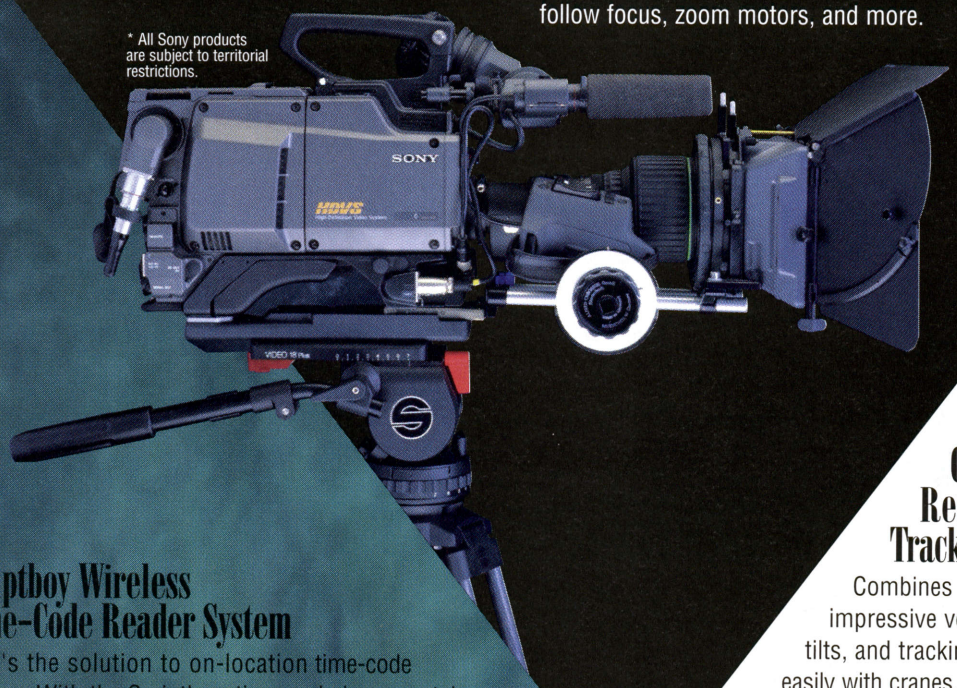

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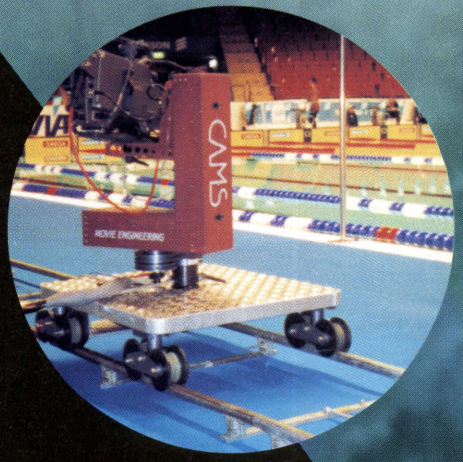

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The Post Process

HIPPI is Hip at Sony Pictures Imageworks

by Debra Kaufman

Given the gigantic surge in digital image-making, the way in which effects facilities and post houses deal with immense quantities of data is becoming an increasingly pressing issue. Just a few years ago, a feature film with 100 shots was considered a huge undertaking. Nowadays, movies like *The Fifth Element, Contact* and *Titanic,* which each boast over 300 to 400 digital effects shots, are commonplace. Some effects houses even report that they are bidding on pictures with more than 800 shots.

"Productions are getting larger and directors are requiring more complexity as they get more familiar with the technology and the tools get better," explains Todd Outten, director of systems research at Sony Pictures Imageworks. "Everything is scaling up."

A few years ago, many facilities' systems comprised hundreds of gigabytes; today they operate at multiple terrabytes, with each terrabyte equal to 1,024 gigabytes. How facilities process, distribute and manage these large quantities of data is hyper-critical to a project's success; if the system routinely cannot locate or loses digital assets, or if the system is exceedingly slow, the production — and its budget — is in trouble.

Needless to say, effects facilities of all sizes take this problem seriously. Sony Pictures Imageworks now houses a research laboratory focused on solving such problems. Outten manages the facility, which performs "advanced technology development and assessment" by either developing technology not in existence or testing technologies conceived with their vendors, such as Silicon Graphics Inc., Cisco Systems, Ciprico, Essential Communications and, of course, Sony. "This technology is advancing rapidly, and some of it has the potential to change the way your business operates," points out Outten, who came over to SPI from Industrial Light & Magic with SPI CTO Lincoln Hu. "Controlling it is becoming a necessity for people who want to stay competitive."

At SPI's core are the media servers holding all the digital content; the next layer out consists of the computing engines that crunch the numbers to render, composite and perform all the CPU-intensive operations; the last layer includes the workstations utilized by the digital artists. "On the back end, we're moving between the media servers, which are SGI Challenge systems, and the computing engines — the SGI Origin 2000 system," notes Outten. "These systems are hungry for data, and they're very fast. They can crunch data efficiently, so we want to make sure they're not waiting for it."

The system's ability to transfer material quickly and efficiently between these three layers was recently upgraded at SPI; the company had been using a fairly complex combination of FDDI and fast Ethernet, but Outten's team, which included systems administrator Steve Kowalski and systems engineer Rusty Case, researched technologies to determine how to maximize the efficient transmission of data between the servers and computing engines. "At the end of the day, we found that HIPPI (High Performance Parallel Interface) was a solution," Outten explains. "HIPPI came out of the large, supercomputing environment, and is a way to efficiently transfer data between Cray and IBM

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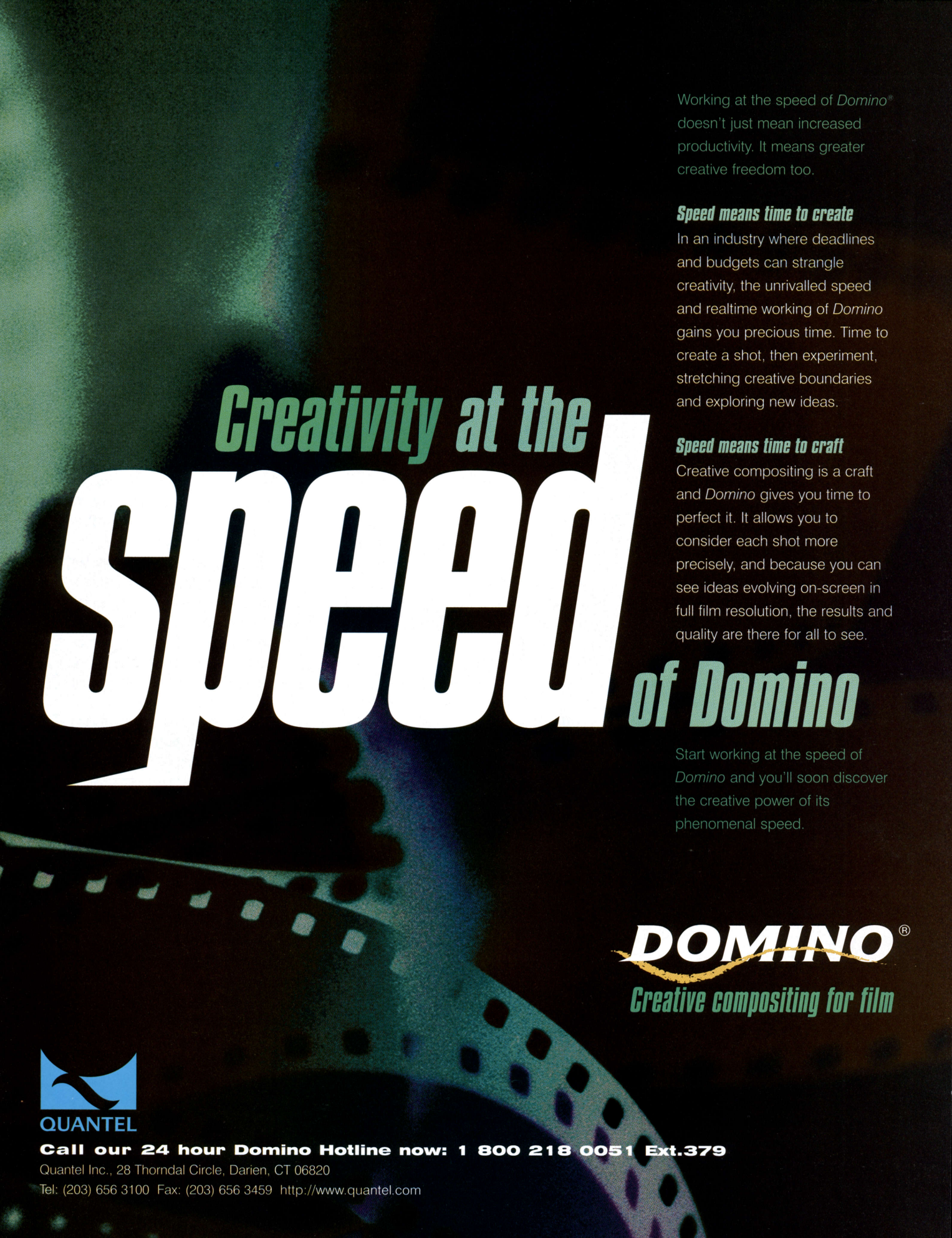
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supercomputers. It's a proven technology that the supercomputing people have been using for years."

The fact that Silicon Graphics Inc. also strongly endorses HIPPI helped to make this technology an even better fit for SPI, which has a major investment in SGI servers, computing engines and workstations. Developing and supplying HIPPI products is SPI's strategic third-party vendor, Essential Communications. "It's a very collaborative relationship," says Outten. "Essential is very interested in understanding the requirements of the entertainment business."

According to Outten, HIPPI offered speed of data transmission and a sterling reputation for reliability. "To put it plainly, it works. It's also very robust; a lot of technology works very well in a small environment, but as you grow and add more, the systems have difficulty dealing with the added volume. HIPPI doesn't have those issues."

In particular, Outten singles out the importance of the crossbar architecture of the Essential switch, which allows SPI to add more media servers and computing engines to the infrastructure "without stepping on the toes of the pre-existing ones. You can grow without affecting the existing engineering."

SPI's "layered approach" to the technical infrastructure means that the facility is maintaining its FDDI and fast Ethernet connections to the artists' workstations, using Essential's HIPPI products to facilitate rapid movement of data between the media servers and computing engines. This approach takes into consideration the fact that the actual artist workstations don't typically require the same speedy transfer of massive amounts of data, making FDDI and fast Ethernet a better fit for the price/performance ratio. But Outten also notes that some equipment — such as Discreet Logic's Flint — are built around the kind of high performance that could benefit from a HIPPI connection, and that SPI might decide to expand its HIPPI deployment in coming years. "There are very few technologies at the level of HIPPI that provide similar capabilities," Outten concludes. ■

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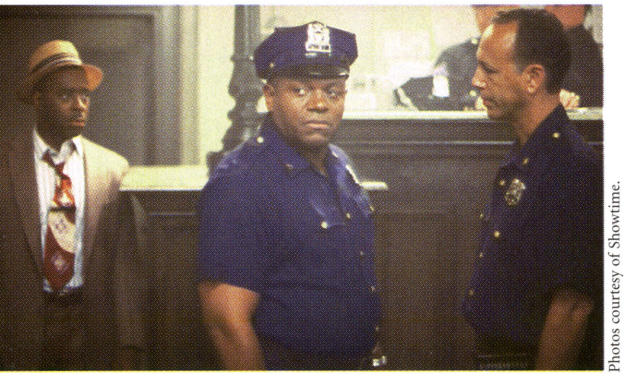
Production Slate

compiled by Andrew O. Thompson

Exposing *Blind Faith*

by Andrew O. Thompson

The recipient of several standing ovations at the recent Sundance Film Festival, the poignant period drama *Blind Faith* is set in the Bronx of the 1950s, where a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality has allowed Charles Williams (Charles Dutton) to become a police officer. Also a tough-loving father, everything Williams has built threatens to fall apart when his mild-mannered son, Charlie Jr. (Garland Whitt), is incarcerated for beating a white youth to death. The tragedy becomes a family affair when the proud cop's brother, John (Courtney B. Vance), agrees to defend the lad in court. But when the murder's real motivation is revealed, the harrowing situation tests the boundaries of paternal tolerance, and exposes the fact that even those who have felt discrimination may hold deep-seated prejudices.



Photos courtesy of Showtime.

Above: In *Blind Faith*, officer Charles Williams (Charles Dutton, center) discovers that his son has been charged with murder. Lower right: Charles and his brother John (Courtney Vance) contemplate the accused lad's grave fate. Cameraman Rodney Charters, CSC employed a bleach-bypass process on the original negative to generate a contrasty, monochromatic look for the film.

Director Ernest Dickerson, ASC (*Juice*, *Surviving the Game*), a former cinematographer reputed for his long association with filmmaker Spike Lee, had hoped that *Blind Faith* would be photographed in black-and-white. Even though Showtime Pictures bankrolled the film for cable broadcast, the backers opted against using monochrome stock for fear of limiting the picture's chances of theatrical distribution overseas.

Award-winning director of photography Rodney Charters, CSC (*Kull the Conqueror*, *Sleepwalkers*, TV's *Nash Bridges*) managed to devise an alternate solution: influenced by the work of Darius Khondji, AFC on David Fincher's *Seven* (see *AC* Oct. '95), he proposed utilizing a bleach-bypass process on the film's original negative to produce a contrasty, monochromatic look on color stock. During the bleach-bypass process, the negative is re-laced in the processor to bypass the bleach tank; this technique leaves all of the silver in the negative, lending the imagery greater contrast, deeper black hues and desaturated colors. After performing a short series of tests, the New Zealand-bred cinematographer noticed that the process produced "a pastel quality, almost like grainy black-and-white [footage] from which the color had been removed and then applied by hand, creating a postcard-type feel."

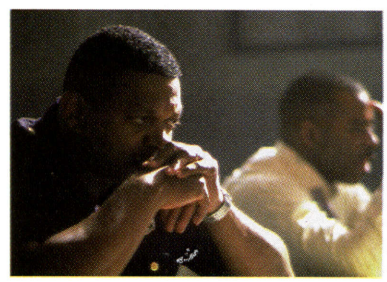
Charters adds, "From my point of view, [using the process] was quite scary because the film totally went south [in terms of latitude] — from a 9 ½-stop dynamic range down to a 4-stop range: two stops over was white, two stops under was black, and everything else was between that four-stop range. And since the project had a made-for-TV budget [$5 million Canadian], we could only have four days of film dailies, so for the rest of the shoot I went back and forth to the transfer house trying to determine from the video how it would translate on film once printed."

As a visual reference, Dickerson showed Charters the 1964 film *I Am Cuba* (*AC* July '95), director Mikhail Kalatzov's agit-prop poem about Cold War-era Cuba. The film's artistic aesthetics appealed to the cinematographer, who had trained for his career at the University of Auckland Art School and London's Royal College of Art. Charters recalls of the film, "During the scene in which the sugar cane farmer stands by a donkey with his child, remembering his life, [the filmmakers were] working on the negative by dripping oil down a sheet of glass in front of the frame, and then shooting and compositing it live — some of the imagery in that picture is just staggering!"

The lyrical, handheld style of *I Am Cuba*'s Russian cameraman, Sergei Urusevsky, also influenced *Blind Faith*, which was primarily shot handheld by camera operator Andrew Chimura. The cameraman used a "Panavised" Aaton 35-III (a Panaflex served as the backup) in a mode Charters characterizes as "in-your-face framing: rather than backing off, we were right in there with a 21mm lens."

Within the overly contrasty, bleach-bypass world of *Blind Faith*, Charters decided to distinguish the look of Charlie Jr.'s inviting, happy homelife from that of his dark, depressing incarceration. Charters chose to use Eastman Kodak's Vision 320T 5277 as his primary film stock because of the manner in which the low-contrast emulsion responded to the bleach-bypass strategy. "About 90 percent of the film is told as a flashback," the cinematographer notes. "I started with 200 ASA EXR 5293 and a normal treatment for the contemporary prologue, and began the flashback segment with 5293 plus heavier diffusion [white net], an antique suede filter, and normal processing. When Charles gets the phone call [informing him of his son's arrest] the diffusion comes off; the bleach-bypass begins as he's in the car going to the police station."

He expounds, "I realized in test-



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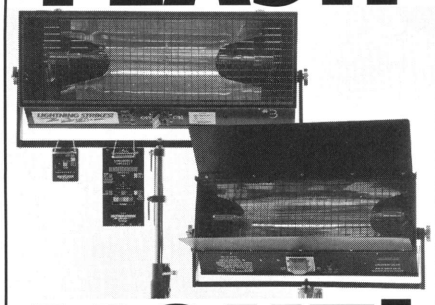

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ing that the 5277 was better able to retain the softer tones than the more contrasty 5293 — the diffusion and smoke also helped greatly. That was also true of the Vision 500T 5279, but to a lesser extent. So most of the period material, both interiors and exteriors, was shot on 5277. Night exteriors were done on 79."

Interiors of the Williams' house were shot using an antique suede filter and white net diffusion, and heavily smoked to accentuate the swaths of sunlight streaming through windows. Since the dwelling was a practical location, Charters had to create sunlight with narrow-beamed sources: lensless 4K Pars outside, and small 1200s and 1K Pars inside. These tiny fixtures fit within the space limitations, while providing radiant rays which warmed the earth-toned furnishings and wood-paneled walls. Charters details, "A lot of those shots involved 180-degree pans across the room, which really restricted the size of the units we could hide inside the house without cutting holes in the wall. We could have put up Kino Flos for softness and basic fill, but they wouldn't have given us hard, aggressive hits. We put a small gantry rig inside the rooms and I hung up some babies, but a 2K was physically too big to hide above our frame. Because of the bleach-bypass, the babies, Pars and even 200-watt peppers took on a life of their own."

The story's police precinct was rendered in a noir-like contrast of hardened extremes; those scenes were filmed straight on a slightly smoked set through the crisp gaze of unfiltered Primo primes and zooms. Lighting the lobby were standing poles fitted with 3200°K fluorescent lamps and Kino Flo fixtures in single, double and quadruple banks "to simulate areas of light that would have otherwise been windows." As a counterpoint to the darkened surroundings, the bleach-bypassed emulsion produces a slight incandescence in the sources, which registers as a hazy halo enveloping them. "That had more to do with the way the silver bursts its boundaries," explains Charters. "That latent image is there, but the image spills over because of the silver, and the moment you go hot with something it just blooms — like a ProMist."

Also illuminating the holding cell's interior was the hot toplight of a big-eye 10K aimed through a large Chimera softbox. Added contrast concerns developed during the filming of a jail cell conflict between attorney John Williams and an Irish cop. Out of dramatic and broadcast considerations, however, the cinematographer opted not to strike a balance between the darker skin of actor Courtney Vance and the ruddy complexion of the other actor in the scene. Offers Charters, "Basically, I didn't fill [in Vance] because with video, if you fill, you flatten everything; still, the bleach-bypass process is so aggressive that occasionally I would have liked to have done it. I didn't make that much effort to control one or the other: this is a film about violence, and I elected to let it play. For that particular confrontation, I put a double net on [the actor playing the Irish police officer] because there was a single top light dealing with them both."

Few location exteriors were captured in Toronto during the 22-day production of *Blind Faith* last May. But when required, Charters — a longtime resident of the Canadian city — had little trouble pinpointing architecture which could double for the look of the Bronx circa 1950. Notes Charters, "Toronto has [standing street]poles down the streets, similar kinds of clapboard, Victorian-style homes, and the old red brick [buildings] downtown." The town's former city hall served as the exterior of both the courtroom and the prison; various downtown streets doubled for Harlem; and the Williams' home belonged to a retired still photographer living in the city's Greektown area.

Toronto's Silver Dollar nightclub doubled as a Greenwich Village jazz joint where Charlie Jr.'s bohemian uncle, Eddie (Kadeem Hardison), struts his stuff as a saxophonist. To accentuate Charters' picturesque palette, production designer Jeff Ginn lined the walls with Day-Glo neon tubing. The cinematographer then brightened the bebop club with swirling Parker rock 'n' roll fixtures (approximate in strength to 1K Pars) gelled in alternating shades of peacock green, salmon pink, and steel blue. Notes Charters, "In England, they call those fixtures 'rockets.' They're the type of lamp you use in Maxi-Brutes; they have a more aggressive punch and a slight oblong feel, and you can rotate the beam. But I had to severely gel the

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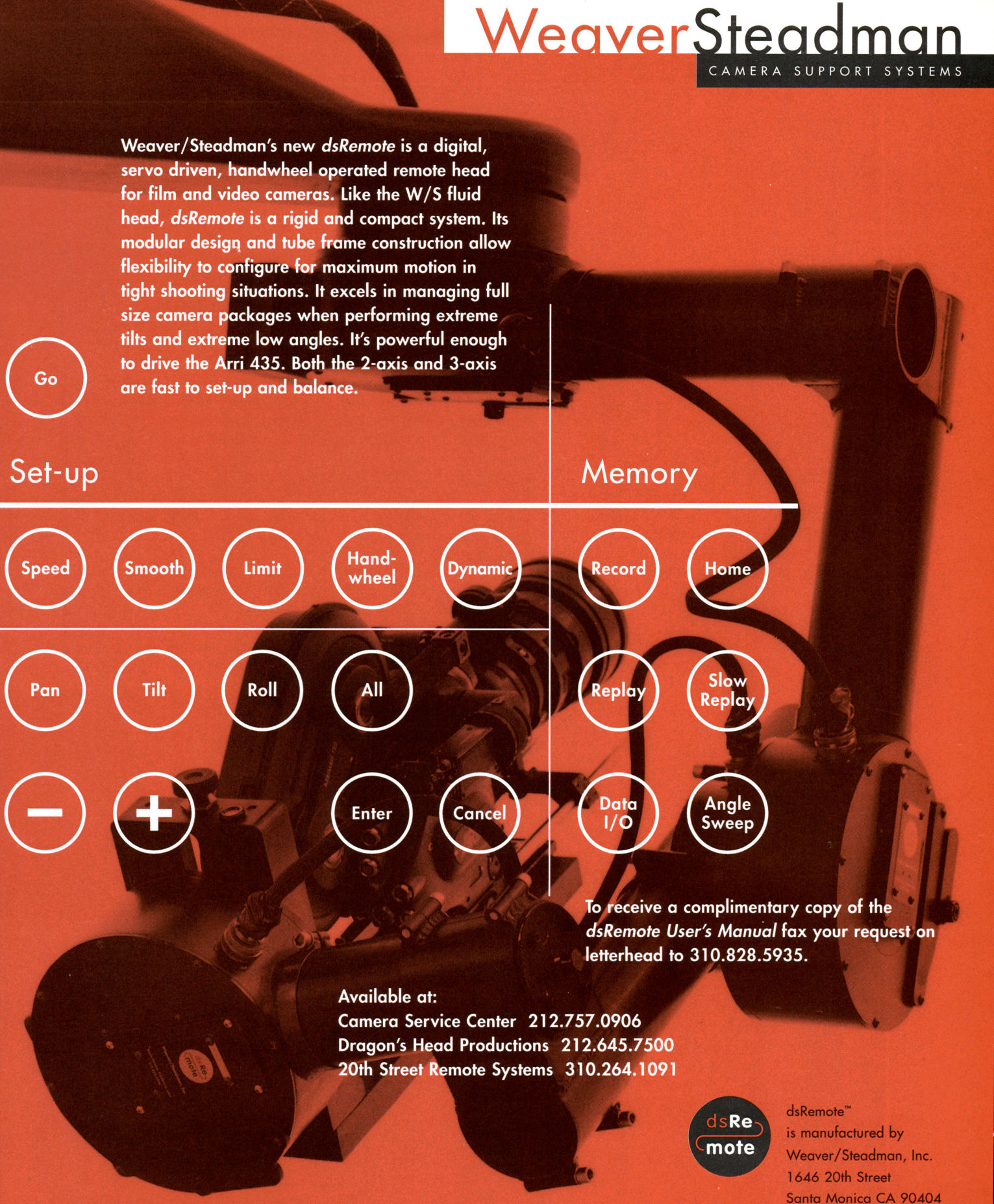

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Center: Senior students Tim (Matthew Lillard) and Chris (Michael Vartan) cruise the campus in *Dead Man's Curve*. The fictional university was shot on location in Baltimore at Towson University and Johns Hopkins University. Far right: Tim and Chris enjoy a bout of male-bonding with their soon-to-be-slain roommate (Randall Batinkoff). Cinematographer Joey Forsyte had a 2K Xenon source rotated from side to side to mimic the lighthouse ambiance.

colored backlights which you can see behind the performers when they're on stage. I had to use ND 21 to get them down to a point where we could keep the color, because the bleach-bypass would have burned them out."

The cinematographer's only regret in utilizing the bleach-bypass is that its contrast-altering effects are not as apparent on video and TV screens. He submits, "When Roger LaPrairie at Encore Video did the negative transfer on an Ursa Gold Rank, a lot of that extreme contrast was not apparent. [The postproduction team was] attuned to softening, flattening and creating more of a romantic look for the video image: we could never get the timing back to where it was on the print. Both Roger and the film timer at Deluxe, Harry Muller, did a great job given the challenges of the process, but I still prefer the print."

Despite the technical and commercial dilemmas presented by the bleach-bypass process, Charters considers the technique to be a means of adding artistic flair to cinematic lighting — a serious consideration in his view, given the broad latitude of many modern stocks. Notes Charters, "[In today's emulsions] there are not enough of the painterly qualities that were part of my art-school training, when eliminating tones from the palette was within your control. There's something wonderful about pictures like [former cinematographer Zhang Yimou's] *Raise the Red Lantern,* where the palette is controlled so aggressively — there's nothing but the red lanterns and a brown, ochre tone.

"With normal stocks, the latitude is beyond belief: you can throw vicious ranges at the stock and still retain quite wonderful images in the highlights. But if you really want to be aggressive about style, it's a challenge to go to extremes. You need *extreme* lights — Xenons and lensless 4K Pars — but you often do not have the space for those units. With bleach-bypass, I can control [tones] to a matter of degree: achieving blacks in a lit room with much smaller fixtures is not a problem. And even if I can't, I love the fact that I can 'paint' the image: it's distinctive, strong and there's no question that it makes a statement about the storytelling process."

Charters is shooting the current season of the television series *The Pretender.* At press time, Dickerson was on location in Vancouver directing the ABC-TV pilot *FutureSport,* starring Wesley Snipes.

Blind Faith *had its initial Showtime broadcast in February and will receive international theatrical distribution this summer.*

A Well-Lit Path Along *Dead Man's Curve*

by Andrew O. Thompson

Academic myth holds that if one's college cohabitant commits suicide, the surviving roommate is granted an automatic A+ grade point average as compensation for a semester's worth of grief. Judging by its consistently crowded screenings at this year's Sundance Film Festival, the thriller *Dead Man's Curve* successfully breathes life into the long-harbored fantasies of many a university undergrad with its dark and twisted premise: two senior college students — the narcissistic Tim (Matthew Lillard) and the reserved Chris (Michael Vartan) — opt to better their odds for acceptance into Harvard's graduate program by engineering the murder of their roommate, Rand (Randall Batinkoff), and then making his death appear self-inflicted. If only it were that simple.

According to debut director Dan Rosen — a former standup comedian and screenwriter of the indie black comedy *The Last Supper* — the script's premise was inspired by an actual incident in which one of his collegiate colleagues received an offer of a 4.0 grade point average following a personal tragedy. Plotwise, the myriad contortions of *Dead Man's Curve* were inspired by Henri Georges Clouzot's *Diabolique* (1954) in that "all of the characters know more than the audience." Summing up the picture's visual concept as "film noir on a college campus," Rosen and director of photography Joey Forsyte (*Naked in New York, The Dark Backward,* the BBC documentary *Naked Hollywood*) drew inspiration for the film's morbid, Machiavellian mood by viewing Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951). The cinematographer observes, "Dan has a great visual vocabulary, and has an incredible instinct for how to play the humor. He said, 'Think of *Dead Man's Curve* more as a Hitchcock film than a black comedy — a thriller about the darker corner of college life.' That directive had a lot to do with camera movement, the tone of the lighting and how best to make a college campus look *noir,* as opposed to the bright, sunny place that it usually is.

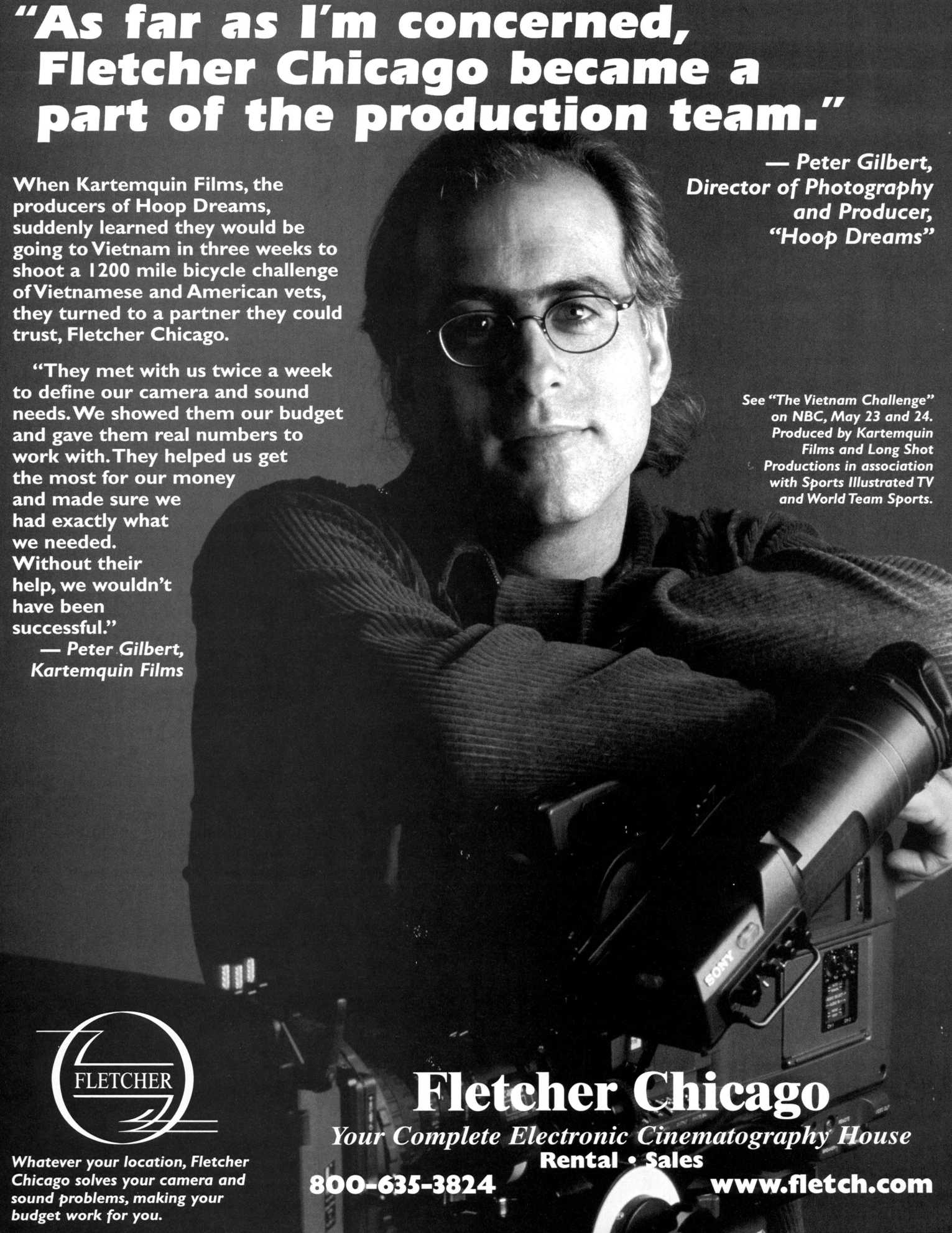
"Film noir is a great reference," she adds, "because it came out of the similar issues we faced on this movie: trying to find an aesthetic to solve practical problems. [On many film noir productions], crews were starting to shoot on location, and they didn't have a lot of time for setups. For example, in *Touch of Evil* [shot by Russell Metty, ASC] they sometimes wanted to show 360 degrees in a room, so lights ended up being put on the floor."

Dead Man's Curve shot on location for 21 days last August in the director's hometown of Baltimore, Maryland,

Photos by Randy Shropshire, courtesy of Mount Royal Entertainment.

primarily on the campuses of Towson University — Rosen's alma mater — and Johns Hopkins University. Forsyte's main camera was a Panaflex Gold, while an Aaton 35-III served for handheld shots. The cinematographer made use of Kodak emulsions: 200 ASA EXR 5293 for day interiors, 50 ASA 5245 for day exteriors, and Vision 500T 5279 for night scenes.

As the film's murderous duo further their scheming, Tim's vainglorious deceptions run rampant. In a ruse designed to help Chris win back his girl-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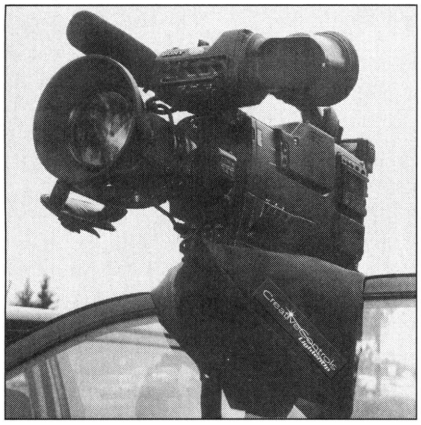

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friend, Emma (Keri Russell), Tim convinces him to bedeck her room with candles; after Tim escorts Emma back to her room, Chris is to hide in the closet and then, at the appropriate moment, jump out and surprise her. All goes according to plan, until the inebriated Emma ends up on her knees before Tim — massaging his ego, as it were. The room was constructed in empty office space in the Towson University dorm Prettyman Hall. This setup, however, inhibited ventilation and produced sweltering temperatures which caused a great deal of discomfort for the crew. Notes Forsyte, "Candles are a hard device and lighting [more than 100] candles in a room still doesn't really light the space. For the sake of the story, you had to see what was happening or you'd miss the point — it wasn't about hiding things in shadow. I just came up with the softest source I could and worked with it off the floor."

The cinematographer augmented the natural firelight with homemade softboxes; Forsyte fit these triangular boxes with Photofloods and layered them with tracing paper. Coupled with the candles, these sources lent the dorm room an amber aura. She used additional sources to highlight the wicked expression of actor Matthew Lillard. Observes Forsyte, "He's got a wonderful face; you can make him look as innocent as an angel or purely evil. Certainly his performance is where it all starts, but in that scene I consciously lit him like a devil. I brought in these two very low lights from either side of his face — terrible lighting that you normally would never do on anyone — to make him look diabolical."

Interior illumination for the college's various sites — a frat house, dorm rooms, an on-campus bar — was usually generated from China Hats fitted with 250W Photoflood bulbs. Forsyte chose these types of sources for their mobility and maneuverability, and often amplified their luminance with Kino Flos or smaller practical lights. The cinematographer explains, "I didn't have a lot of time to flag [fixtures]. If you get the right ones, they're deep enough so that the light falls downwards and doesn't spread out over the walls. But they get a little tricky sometimes if the actors are leaning in too close or get too far away."

The China Hat sources proved useful for a sequence that takes place in a bar after Rand's wake. To torment Rand's grieving girlfriend, Natalie (Tamara Craig Thomas), Tim spins a yarn about Rand taking a prostitute to his high school prom just to spite an ex-sweetheart. As the tale becomes more macabre, the pub's surrounding ambiance darkens (via the use of dimmers), with only the China Hat above Lillard remaining lit. Rosen notes that this effect is a reference to a shot in *A Soldier's Story* (shot by Russell Boyd and Peter Sova), a Forties-era military tale in which an Army sergeant recounts the harassment of a black servicemen by white officers. The director notes, "While the sergeant in that film is telling the story, he's looking into a mirror and everything behind him goes completely black. The shot focuses on his reflection, which makes it a bit different from our shot."

In a third-act confrontation between the conspiring roommates, Tim is once again positioned beneath a China Hat — this time in a dorm room. Aiming a pistol at his cohort, Tim spills his guts about the supposed reasons behind his sociopathic arrogance. To lend dramatic impact to this "confessional" moment, the filmmakers wanted the back wall to seem as if was moving in towards Tim. Comments Rosen, "It's a similar situation [to the previously detailed setup]: he's telling a story that he's completely into, and is giving a performance; in both of these scenes he's lying. The character is so happy with himself that he's almost onstage. But [actually moving the wall] would have been too expensive and too hard to do. Matthew [Lillard] suggested just moving him instead."

Pulling off this shot required that both Lillard and cinematographer Forsyte be strapped to a dolly, with the China Hat rigged in a stationary position above them. Says Forsyte, "When we're moving to the wall, it's so slow that it takes a while to even realize it's happening. I rigged the light above his head to increase the sense of movement in the shot. When we pull away from the wall [after Tim completes his fabricated monologue], it's very quick, and that's when you really get a sense of vertigo."

The most trying location of the 21-day shoot occurred at Turkey Point, a cliff where the night exteriors of both Rand's murder and the film's triple-cross climax were set. Situated back from the bluff's

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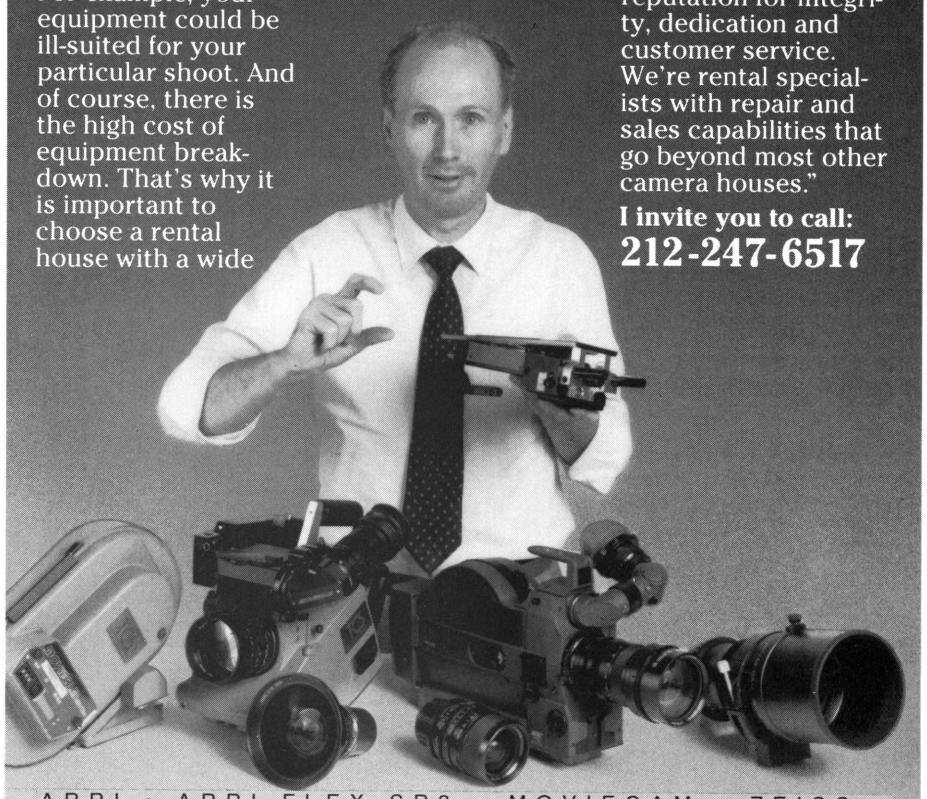

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edge was a fully-functioning lighthouse built in 1833. Two days prior to this scene's shoot, however, the Coast Guard's L.A.-based film unit forbade the production to use the site. This left the cinematographer in the unenviable position of having to mimic the lighthouse's feeble ambiance. Notes Forsyte, "[Inside the lighthouse] was a highly reflective mirrored surface that was very specular, so it didn't really put out lumens [along the cliff's surface]; it was just focused out a mile away from the shore to be a reflective source as opposed to a light source. From below, I could see that there was a bulb being projected into this mirrored surface, but when you stood there in the middle of the night there was no light coming out."

Forsyte had initially planned to reflect a 2K Xenon source — a 571 Brightlight — into a revolving mirror that would then project a glow from the lighthouse interior. Instead, she had to place the fixture on a Condor, situating it behind the lighthouse in such a way that it shone through the tower's panes. (A second Condor outfitted with a 12K provided an aura of backlit moonlight.) After several attempts to revolve the Brightlight 360 degrees proved aesthetically unsuitable, Forsyte had a crew member rotate the fixture from side to side. She adds, "I really wanted the sense of the beam coming into the lens, and I was trying to get some flare to happen. But I was shooting with Primo 4:1 zoom, which is difficult to flare. We were looking for a very specific composition, so every time I set up the camera we had to raise or lower the Condor a little bit just to line it up with the lens."

The cinematographer also used smoke to highlight the haunting quality of the beam as it cuts through the inky blackness of the nighttime sky. Unfortunately, the production's various fog-producing devices — an antiquated fogger and a smoke machine — kept breaking down. Forsyte recalls, "The machines finally died, and when we were doing close-ups [lit with a 2500W Par with fill bounced into a Griffolyn], we had to come up with a very makeshift solution: Dan literally sat under the camera smoking a pipe, along with three other people puffing away on cigarettes! Keeping the smoke continuity so that you could see the beam was difficult, but our Par setup turned

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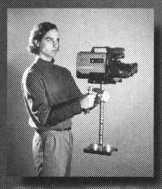

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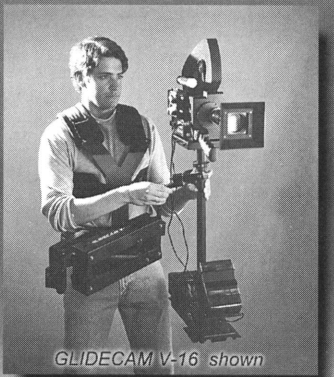

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out to be a really great device."

Forsyte recently completed location work in Montana, Utah, Idaho, Nevada and California for the road movie *Me and Will*, which she describes as a "female *Easy Rider* meets *Thelma & Louise*."

Dead's Man Curve *will be released this fall by Trimark Pictures.*

SOC Seminar

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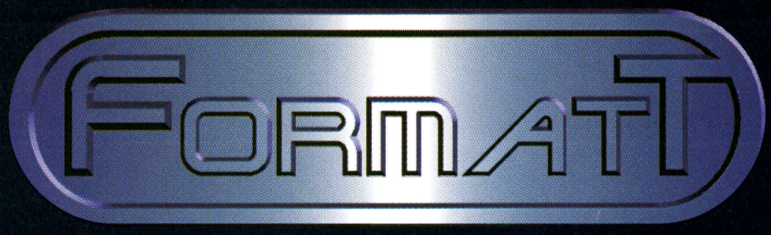

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Cinematographer Nicola Pecorini heads to the American desert to help director Terry Gilliam unleash a long-awaited film version of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.*

by Stephen Pizzello
Photography by Peter Mountain

We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like "I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive..." And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming: "Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?"

—The opening paragraph of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Since its initial publication in 1971, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has been the literary equivalent of a bottled genie begging for its cinematic release. The book's subtitle proclaims it to be "A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream," and Hunter Thompson's drug-addled yarn delivers on that promise in spectacularly surreal fashion, whipping up a veritable tsunami of nightmare visions, paranoid rants and fire-and-brimstone diatribes that boil with an apoplectic political rage. Within its pages, readers accompany wired but world-weary journalist Raoul Duke and his equally overamped Samoan attorney, Dr. Gonzo, on a non-stop

chemical bender through Vegas, the metaphorical nerve center of a nation that has lost touch with the liberating ideals of the 1960s. Rife with elegiacal overtones, the duo's frenzied expedition becomes a demonic cross between Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Dante's *Inferno,* rendered in a volcanic torrent of prose that erupts with the impact of a Hieronymus Bosch hellscape.

Although *Fear* has inspired one previous feature film (the straightforward and largely ignored 1980 adaptation *Where the Buffalo Roam*), Thompson's cult following has persistently clamored for a definitive screen treatment. With the uncorking of Terry Gilliam's manic interpretation, the Freaks will finally have their day.

Photos courtesy of Universal Pictures.

Universal Pictures' production of *Fear and Loathing* represents the culmination of a long and twisted industry saga. Over the past quarter century, the Hollywood rumor mill has rattled off a veritable roll-call of big-name directors (including Martin Scorsese and Oliver Stone) in connection with various aborted attempts to animate Thompson's comically deranged opus. According to legend, the infamously mercurial — and mercenary — wordsmith helped to delay the undertaking by selling book rights to dozens of unsuspecting investors (some in perpetuity). After protracted bouts of legal wrangling, a go project was finally announced several years ago by producer Laila Nabulsi, with director Alex Cox (*Repo Man*) slated to take the helm. Cox eventually left the project, however, and was replaced by Gilliam, one of cinema's most inventive visualists (see interview on page 42).

Thompson's apocalyptic tale also lured in a stellar cast. The showy role of Raoul Duke (the writer's fictional alter ego) was awarded to Johnny Depp, who subsequently spent four months tracking the author's every move and mapping out his mannerisms. The part of Dr. Gonzo, Duke's unruly and overweight attorney, was fleshed out (literally) by Benicio Del Toro, who gained close to 50 pounds to approximate the character's slovenly girth. The picture's impressive array of supporting players includes Tobey Maguire, Christina Ricci, Ellen Barkin, Gary Busey, Cameron Diaz, Mark Harmon, Katherine Helmond and Harry Dean Stanton.

Raoul Duke (Johnny Depp) surveys the scene while covering the "Fabulous Mint 400" off-road race in Las Vegas.

Given this assemblage of talent and the story's strong visual potential, most cinematographers would have given their eyeteeth to land such a plum assignment. As it turned out, director of photography Nicola Pecorini won the job by amiably acknowledging that he had already sacrificed an eye. Following up on a tip from Depp (whom he had met while shooting footage for the actor's directorial debut, *The Brave*), Pecorini sent Gilliam a highly unusual audition reel which made light of the fact that the cameraman has sight in just one of his sockets. "I've seen how people look at demo tapes," says Pecorini, who lost his left eye to retinal cancer when he was just 16 months old. "Usually someone will put the tape in, look at it for 30 seconds, and then start taking phone calls or typing on the computer. On my reel, the screen starts out half black. A friend of mine, director Tommy Schlamme, sits there speaking very highly of me, but he adds, 'I have to warn you, though, that what you're looking at right now is what Nicola Pecorini sees, because he has only one eye.' Then he stands up and takes a piece of black tape off the lens to show the difference. If you're watching the reel, you immediately say to yourself, 'Who is the jerk who sent me this tape?!' Now that I know Terry, I can understand why he liked it, because the first thing he wants to

know about someone new is, 'Can he laugh?'"

Indeed, Pecorini's ability to spoof himself convinced Gilliam that he had found his man, despite the fact that the cameraman had previously served as lead cinematographer on only one feature film: the Sundance standout *Rhinoceros Hunting in Budapest* (see festival coverage in *AC* April '97).

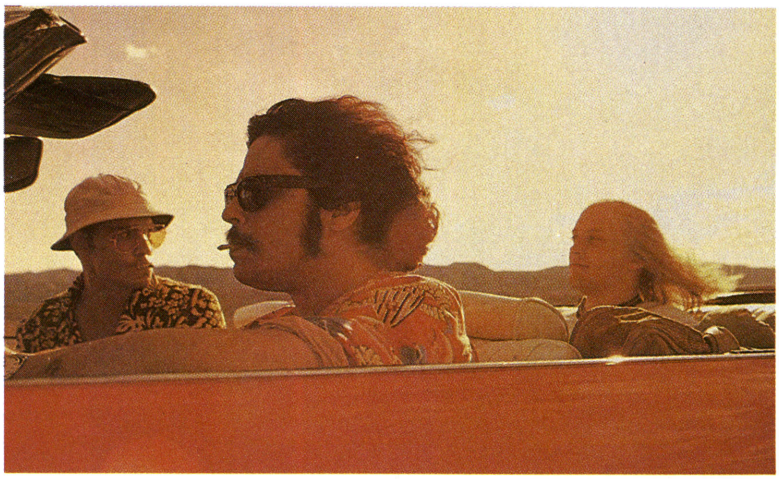
In reality, however, Pecorini's photographic pedigree was far more extensive than that. His grandfather, Fedele Toscani, had been a pioneering photojournalist in Italy during the 1920s, and young Nicola grew up in darkrooms. During his teens, he found work as a fashion photographer, but quickly grew bored with the repetitious shoots. His father, a journalist, introduced him to a friend who needed a cameraman to shoot 16mm news footage in Geneva, Switzerland, and Pecorini spent the next three years filming everything "from hockey games to short pieces about the lives of spiders."

The budding cameraman found these varied experiences to be invaluable, but soon sought bigger challenges. During a vacation to the U.S. in 1981, he picked up a copy of *American Cinematographer,* in which he spotted an ad for one of the first West Coast Steadicam workshops. Upon attending the classes, he instantly fell in love with the revolutionary new filmmaking rig. "All of a sudden I had one tool that would enrich my vocabulary in making motion pictures," he says. "The great thing about the Steadicam is that you don't need mediation with anyone else. The dolly is a great tool, and so is the crane, but you always have to rely on more than one man. With the Steadicam, you become one with the camera."

Pecorini soon purchased his own Steadicam, and over the next 16 years he found an abundance of work in Europe with many renowned cameramen, including ASC members Giuseppe Rotunno and Vittorio Storaro, as well as Tonino Delli Colli. He eventually became a trusted lieutenant to Storaro, who promoted him to B-camera operator and second-unit director of photography. "*Little Buddha* [*AC* May '94] was a bit of a turning point for me," says Pecorini. "The logistics of the shoot were very complicated, so Vittorio delegated quite a bit of work to the second unit. I learned that I could take responsibility, and that's when I decided to become a cinematographer."

His first job as a fully-fledged director of photographer was a collaboration with Schlamme on the first season of the HBO series *Tracy Takes On...* in 1995. Pecorini then shot the low-budget *Rhinoceros Hunting in Budapest* for Michael Haussman. He says that he accepted the assignment for two reasons: "First, I had worked with Michael before as an operator, and we'd gotten along very well; second, I was the only one who would take that little money! It was a small movie, with a budget of about $1.4 million, but the script was good and I thought it had a lot of potential. Creatively, it was a very rewarding experience."

Pecorini admits that he is still astounded to have landed the *Fear and Loathing* gig, but he reports that Gilliam's collaborative nature and team ethic made the transition to a major feature quite rewarding. "Terry is able to put his ego aside on the set, and that makes him a joy to work with," the cinematographer attests. "Let's say you have a complicated scene with 25 candles that need to be lit. If things are moving slowly, he may start clapping his hands and saying to the prop man, 'C'mon, c'mon, what are you doing?' And the prop guy might get mad and say, 'I'm lighting the candles for *your* movie!'



Above: Gilliam (left) and Pecorini set up a driving shot with the help of a special camera rig attached to the Red Shark. Pecorini prefers to shoot car scenes with a minimum of lighting equipment, using natural sunlight whenever possible. Right: As Dr. Gonzo (Benicio Del Toro) mans the wheel, Duke scrutinizes a hapless hitchhiker (Tobey Maguire).

On his knees before the gaping maw of the Bazooko Circus, Duke uses his trusty flyswatter to battle a horde of imaginary bats. The filmmakers added production designer Alex McDowell's clown mouth to the front entrance of the Stardust hotel/casino after wheeling it through the streets of Vegas.

But Terry will reply, 'Not *my* movie, *our* movie.' That's a big thing, because it's very rare to find people like that. When some directors walk onto the set, they won't even say 'Good morning.' But Terry constantly has his sensors attuned to the crew's mood and state of mind."

During the duo's preproduction discussions for *Fear and Loathing,* Pecorini also discovered that Gilliam had no qualms about doling out creative challenges to his new cinematographer. "He came to me with this book of paintings by Robert Yarber and said, 'I want the movie to look like this.' Our production designer, Alex McDowell [*The Lawnmower Man, The Crow*], introduced Terry to this guy's work, which is very hallucinatory: the paintings use all kinds of neon colors, and the light sources don't necessarily make sense.

"I had about two days of panic after Terry told me what he wanted," Pecorini confesses. "But then I said, 'If he wants red skies, I'll give him red skies.' The way I approached it technically was to use colored gels in front of my lights. We did a lot of tests, mainly with Roscolux and CalColor gels." Key selections included Roscolux fire (#19), gold rush (20), pistachio (92), chocolate (99), walnut (156), follies pink (344) and Italian blue (370), as well as CalColor red (4660) and pink (4890).

Pecorini mounted his multicolored array of gels in front of a special series of Italian-made lighting units (see photo on page 40) that had been pioneered by Vittorio Storaro. "Some years ago, Vittorio saw these landing lights for airplanes, and he began thinking about using multi-point sources in the same types of frames," Pecorini explains. "The guy who makes them, Pippo Cafolla, is Vittorio's longtime gaffer, and his company in Rome is called Iride. Pippo has two sons, Fabio and Daniele, who also work at the company. Fabio has been Vittorio's console operator for about 12 years; Daniele works more as a spark [electrician], but he gaffed for me on *Rhinoceros Hunting in Budapest.* Pippo started out by making these units called Super-Jumbos, which have 24 [600W or 1,000W] lights in them, and Jumbos, which have 16 lights. There are also Mini-Jumbos, with eight lights, and Tornados, which have smaller fixtures [650W Par 36s]. These various units have a lot of kick, and if you place them at the right distance, you will get only one shadow. The lights work on a dimmer system, though, so you have to keep that in mind when you're designing your lighting plan."

For *Fear and Loathing,* Pecorini ordered a 200-kilowatt package of the Italian units. "The lights are great, but you have to be careful with them, because it's easy to blow them out when you turn them on," he cautions. "You have to bring them up quite slowly with the dimmer console. At the beginning of the show, we lost a few lights! Later

Gonzo Filmmaking

The doctor of journalism demonstrates the downside of a PhD in pharmaceuticals as he engages in wary conversation with a "lounge lizard."

on, in the desert, we also had some problems with sand in the dimmers, so Daniele came to the States to help us out."

Pecorini used the Iride fixtures for the majority of his lighting needs, but he supplemented them with a selection of Kino Flos, Par cans, babies and peppers. "I don't like the texture of HMI lights," he states. "They don't look real to me, especially if you're trying to simulate the sun. I much prefer putting up a battery of six or seven Jumbos 100 feet away with a ½ blue gel in front of them. On this show, I got my special lighting package from Rome and the rest from the [Burbank, California-based] Hollywood Rental Company, which had just come out of more or less the same experience, on a much bigger scale, with *Bulworth* [Warren Beatty's upcoming film, photographed by Storaro, which will be covered in the June issue of *AC*]."

Given the desert vistas of *Fear and Loathing,* Gilliam and Pecorini opted to shoot the picture in widescreen Super 35. The cameraman was familiar with the format, having worked as an operator for director of photography Ronnie Taylor, BSC on Italian horrormeister Dario Argento's 1988 frightfest *Terror at the Opera.* "We chose Super 35 over straight anamorphic for several reasons. First of all, with anamorphic, you don't have a wide enough choice of lenses. And while I love the format, I don't like the opticality of it. It's an optical aberration to start with, and it's an optical aberration to correct it once you project it. The ideal anamorphic would be to have the same morphing lens that you shoot with to project with. Of course, you can't have the same lens on every projector in the world!

"The other thing is that while there is a 20mm anamorphic lens, it weighs a ton, and to work decently you have to shoot at T5.6 at least. You can forget about having strong backlight with anamorphic. I've worked on a lot of anamorphic films, and have endured some terrible experiences with it. You always die during the dailies, and you invariably have to reshoot something purely due to the optical instability of the lenses. I didn't want to go through that sort of thing on this show, and we didn't have the money to do it anyway.

"I'd never been in charge of a film shot in Super 35, but I knew most of the problems that came along with it," Pecorini adds. "Most of those weren't a factor, because I don't use zoom lenses, so I couldn't care less about the vignetting. I don't like zooms too much; a good focus puller can change the lens in literally 20 seconds, so why bother with a zoom?"

Pecorini did bend his no-zoom rule to achieve one unusual shot which creeps into one of Duke's eyeballs, where a hallucinatory horde of bats can be seen flapping about. "We needed to stay inside Johnny Depp's pupil; I tried doing that shot with a macro lens, but it was too difficult. You have to choose the pupil or the iris, and it becomes very tricky; you're dealing with 1/100 of an inch, and there's a moment when things become fuzzy. In order to avoid that moment, I needed to use so much light that I was working at a stop of T11 or 16; Johnny was sweating and we couldn't do it anymore. In the end, we used a 10:1 zoom with diopters. The bats were added later by [visual effects supervisor] Kent Houston at Peerless Films, Terry's company in London."

For the balance of the film, however, Pecorini shot with Zeiss Standard Speed prime lenses. "I love the Zeiss primes: you can have unbelievably violent kicks from backlight, but those lenses just don't care. That's a great quality, especially if you work at [a stop of] T2.6 or 2.7, like I do. I drive my focus pullers crazy with those kinds of stops."

In terms of specific lens choices, Pecorini indulged Gilliam's preference for wide angles throughout the shoot. "I'd say that we shot about 95 percent of the film with 10mm, 12mm or 14mm lenses; that was our primary range! Sometimes I would check out a shot and say, 'This is 16mm,' and Terry would look at me and joke, 'Are you nuts? That's a telephoto!' We were sometimes literally shooting with a 12mm lens three inches away from Johnny Depp's nose."

The cinematographer's main camera of choice was the Arriflex 535, which allowed him to do a few speed changes during the film's driving scenes. "The speed changes were fairly subtle," he notes. "We sometimes went from 24 to 20 fps to make the car turn faster or take off faster." Elsewhere on the show, Pecorini employed an Arri BL-4S and an Arri 35-III.

Pecorini shot all of the picture's exteriors on Eastman

ON FILM

Dan Curry
Jonathan West
Marvin Rush

"*Star Trek* is a fantasy, but it seeks truths that are timeless. I believe in what we're doing, because I believe we have a responsibility as image makers not to waste the audience's time. After nine years, I still haven't used up the palette. We are still inventing the future." ***–Marvin Rush, ASC***

"*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* is a film noir in space. Our role is the interpretive telling of stories with photography. If you know the answers before you ask the questions, you can be bold and daring and play at the edge of light and shadows. I light as gutsy as I can and push the envelope of film to extremes. Even then, the control we have over highlights, mid-tones and shadows is immense." ***–Jonathan West, ASC***

"Marshall McLuhan was right. The medium is the message. The blending of film and digital technologies gives us freedom to tell any story, but it's the integrity of the people and their ability to collaborate in realizing a shared vision that really matters." ***–Dan Curry***

Premiering 10 years ago, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* launched *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek: Voyager*. This is Marvin Rush's ninth season. He has filmed nearly 200 episodes of the three series. Jonathan West has been lensing *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* since 1992. Visual effects producer Dan Curry has worked on all three series.

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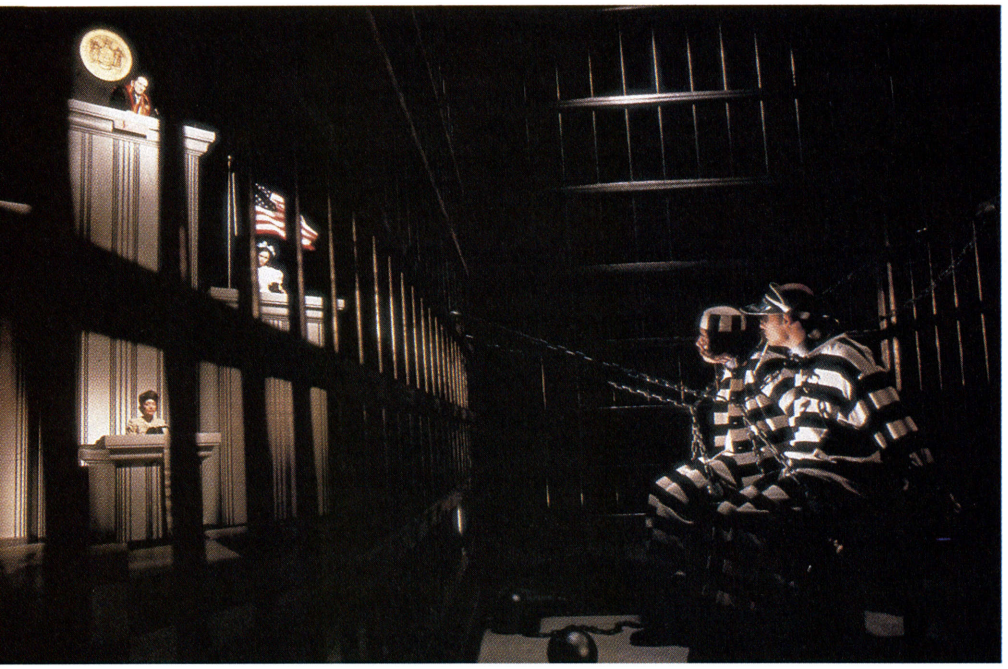
Gonzo Filmmaking

Kodak's 250D Vision 5246 stock, which he found to be well-suited to the early scenes of Duke and Gonzo's raucous road trip to Vegas in their "Red Shark" convertible. "Vittorio had a batch of 5246 that he was testing on *Bulworth,* and I really liked it," says Pecorini, who did some operating on the picture for his old friend.



Above: Duke and Gonzo face a heavy sentence ("Double castration!") in an imaginary courtroom. The look of the scene was inspired by the aesthetics of German expressionism: stylized set design combined with a creative use of light and shadow.

"It has an amazing latitude, especially for overexposure. In the desert, we wanted the images to have a certain undefined quality, without a real horizon anywhere; we wanted it to seem as if you could never really get to the end of the desert. There's a certain kind of unreality outside the characters' car, because everything that matters to them is within the Red Shark. For that reason, I always used an 85 filter during those scenes, even though we were shooting in daylight. Because of the overexposure, the warmth is readable only in the undertones; the backgrounds might be really hot and burned-out, but it doesn't seem fake. Certain colors would change, though — the greens disappeared completely.

"One of the problems we had was that we shot in the desert for three weeks at the beginning of the shoot, but then had to go back during the last week of production, when the desert had a completely different look!" he notes. "It had rained in the interim, so everything was lush and green. The most time-consuming thing we faced in the timing was 'evening out' all of our exteriors."

During that second tour of the desert, Pecorini also faced another, more "hair-raising" dilemma. As fans of *Fear and Loathing* will recall, Duke and Dr. Gonzo extend some roadside hospitality by picking up a hapless hitchhiker, only to end up terrorizing the poor fool with their drug-crazed antics. "The hitchhiker was played by Tobey Maguire, but we had to shoot his scenes at both the beginning and the end of the schedule," the cinematographer reveals. "His character is supposed to be almost bald with a few strands of long hair, but Tobey got another job during the ensuing weeks, and grew his hair back. The morning he showed up for his final scenes, we were like, 'Oh God, how are we going to do this?' He had to wear a bald headpiece, but you could still see that there was hair underneath. Fortunately, the fact that we had overexposed the earlier scenes helped us a lot, because I could just burn him out a bit. Terry had this idea that the hitchhiker was like the Angel of Life and Death, so he was always a bit brighter than the other two characters. We just lit him a bit more or took light away from the others; since Johnny and Benicio were in the front seat and Tobey was in the back, we could just put a piece of Duvateen on the windshield and it was done."

The cinematographer reveals that he took an extremely naturalistic approach to the road-trip footage in order to avoid the "equipment overload" that plagues most productions faced with insert-car work. "I never use lights on insert cars," he maintains. "One of the most common mistakes I've seen over the years is when people try to fight the sun. That's why I don't like HMIs; using them to try to create the sun is a bit like playing God, and I find that to be a bit pretentious. Every time I've seen an insert car lit, it's never looked real to me. For example, if you're driving and a truck passes by, the light [outside the car] changes, but your light doesn't! And if you drive too close to a sign on the road, the bounce off the sign will read inside the car. I try to use the sun alone; if there's no sun, I use the bounce off the sky. In my opinion, the light source in those situations has to respect a dependence on the real elements, so I always use just mirrors or bounce cards. I might use a piece of beadboard cut into a certain shape just out of frame next to the driver's door, or position four little 1' by 1' mirrors on the car to produce little kicks and fill. I like to use the imperfections that are common to real light, such as certain reflections you get from the chrome of the car or the rearview mirror."

Pecorini notes that all of the trailer-mounted car scenes were shot either handheld or with a bungee-cam [a Pee Wee dolly with an offset head]. More complicated master shots of the Red Shark in motion were achieved with a Shotmaker arm

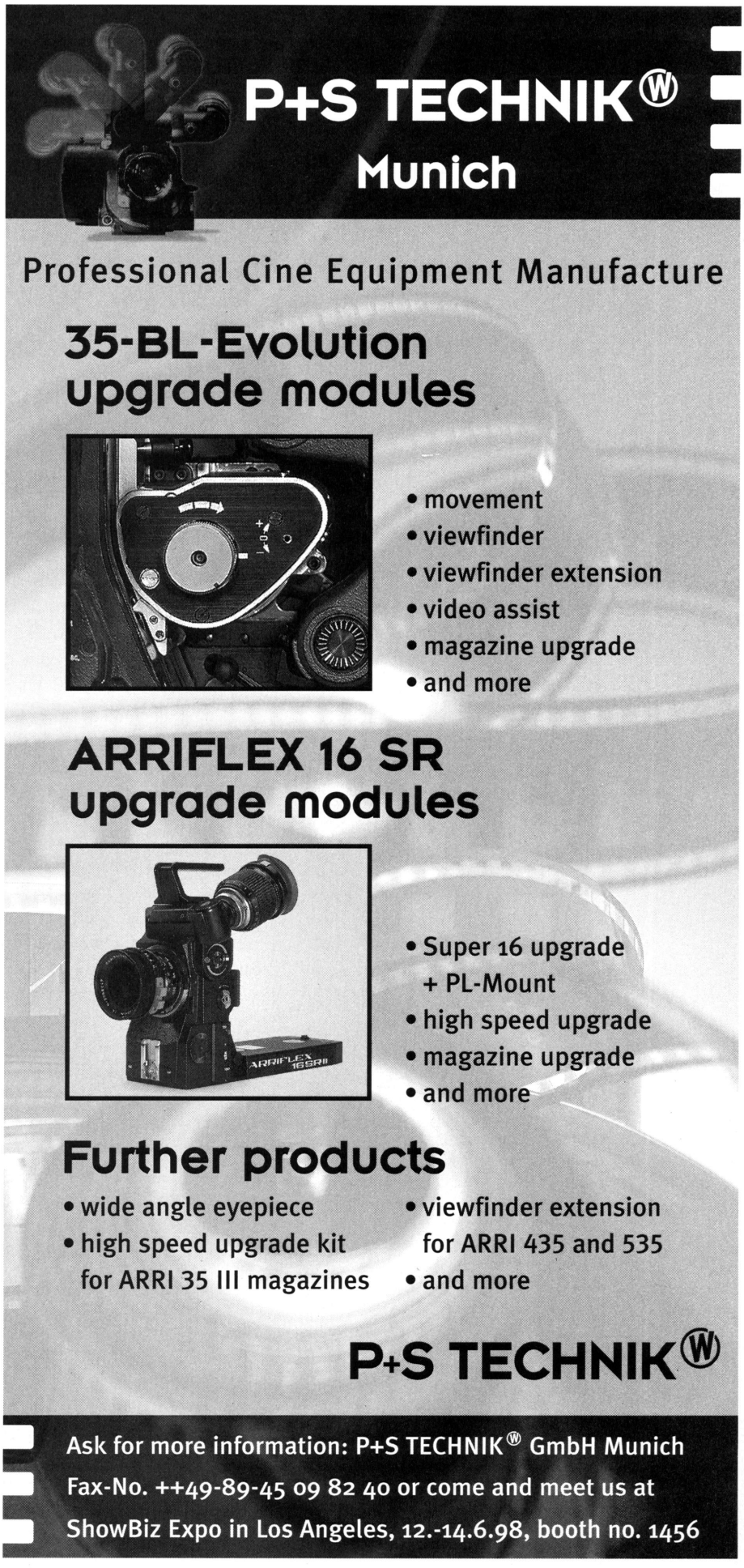
equipped with a remote head.

For scenes which required period Vegas landscapes behind the characters as they drove, the filmmakers found a creative and appropriately retro solution. "We scouted a lot in Vegas, but there's not much architecture left from the 1970s," Pecorini notes. "Another restriction was that with our budget [approximately $18.5 million] we couldn't afford many visual effects. We decided to do a lot of things in-camera, so one of our strategies with the car footage was to use rear-projection."

Fortunately, the film's Los Angeles base was Warner-Hollywood Studios, which turned out to be a treasure trove of rearscreen resources. "Spelling Television has an archive there with an unbelievable amount of stuff from the old TV show *Vegas* — including rear-projection plates that had been shot with three cameras from various angles. You could build an entire scene by putting together these different viewpoints! We spent about two weeks selecting various plates from those archives — sunset and dusk scenes, as well as shots of Fremont Street the way it used to be." The vintage plate shots proved to be an inspired choice, heightening the story's already otherworldly tone an extra notch.

Some of the film's more expansive Vegas vistas were created with modern methods by the visual effects company Illusion Arts. A good example is a sequence in which Duke and Gonzo arrive at the registration tent for the "Fabulous Mint 400," an offroad race which Duke has been assigned to cover for a major sports magazine. The shot begins with a shot of the period Vegas skyline, and then pans down to the bustle of activity on the street below. Notes Pecorini, "We shot the lower part of the scene, and Illusion Arts added the rest digitally."

Later in the film, Gilliam and company blended traditional and



Gonzo Filmmaking

Right: Dr. Gonzo suffers a severe dose of the Fear as he endures a law enforcement seminar. Pecorini used a wide array of colored gels on his lights to achieve a hallucinatory look partially inspired by the paintings of Robert Yarber. Below: The drug-addled duo confront a funhouse reflection of the American Dream on their memorable trip through the Bazooko Circus.

computerized effects techniques to achieve the tale's most outrageous tableau: a nautically-themed cocktail bar populated by genuinely reptilian "lounge lizards." The vision of these peculiar patrons is, of course, produced by the abundance of recreational chemicals that Duke has ingested; the lizards themselves were animatronic replicas built by creature creator Rob Bottin (*The Thing, Deep Rising*). "That scene was quite difficult, because we didn't have enough of the animatronic lizards," says Pecorini. "We were supposed to get about 25 of them, but we wound up with just seven or eight. As a result, we had to use motion-control techniques to make it look as if we had a whole room full of them. That sequence took two full days to film. We had to do all of these different passes with different costumes on the various lizards to get it right. To make things worse, the set consisted almost entirely of mirrored surfaces, which

was a nightmare for me. Hiding the camera therefore became a question of using the right shooting angle.

"I didn't have that much room to move lights around, so I didn't use the Jumbos to light that sequence; we used either practicals or little sources aimed at the things we wanted to see. I used these flashlights called Stream Lights — they're like big Maglites, but they're rechargable. They would last a good hour without recharging. I adapted pepper snoots for them so we could contain them and gel them. That way, we could hide everything without running any cable. We shot it all on Kodak's 5293 stock, because the footage needed to be manipulated so much that we wanted the most perfect grain we could get."

Pecorini's love of the EXR 5293 led him to use it on all of the film's interiors. "I just love that film stock: the blacks are amazing. I had originally thought about using the ENR process on this film, but I ultimately decided that it wasn't necessary. Before I shot the movie, I called Vittorio Storaro down in Argentina, where he was shooting *Flamenco* for Carlos Saura. I asked him very honestly whether he thought ENR was really needed in this day and age; I felt that with the latest stocks, it was possible to achieve those kinds of blacks and densities without such a process. He said, 'I agree with you, and I don't think I'm going to be using ENR anymore myself.'

"The latitude [of the 93] really helped us on this show when we were filming scenes in the Mint Hotel suite, because those sequences were extremely dark. I was using minimal lighting and heavy-duty colored gels on the lights — three full Italian blues. A single Italian blue takes away two stops, so we were taking away six; the light that was coming through was nothing. I was exposing at T2.5, and it would read as an error on my meter! The highlights were almost one stop underexposed, so the lowlights were about three stops underexposed. But we still had the actors' eyes.

"Kodak's Vision 5279 is also an amazing film stock, but the latitude was too wide [for our purposes]," he opines. "We would have had all kinds of highlights popping out. Sometimes I had to use 79, such as when we shot in real casinos; the limitations imposed upon us required it. We couldn't use as many lights as we wanted, because the management in those places didn't want us to bother the gamblers. We had very little time to set up."

Logistical considerations also came into play during filming of the Mint 400 race sequences, which were staged 30 miles south of Vegas at the Jean Dry Lake Bed. In accordance with Hunter Thompson's literary depiction of the event, the race eventually devolves into a massive cloud of sand and dust that all but obscures the participants, who barrel over the sun-baked terrain on motorcycles and in dune buggies.

To whip up a dust storm of truly epic proportions, the crew used a jet engine mounted on a truck to blow sack after sack of Fuller's Earth

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LENS	T-STOP	MAXIMUM REPRODUCTION RATIO	CLOSEST FOCUS FROM FILM PLANE TO SUBJECT
18MM	T3.8-T22	1:1.8	5"
20MM	T2.8-T22	1:1.5	5"
24MM	T4.0-T22	1:1.6	7"
28MM	T2.8-T22	1:1.1	6.5'
35MM	T2.8-T32	1:1.1	6.5"
45MM	T2.8-T22	1:1.25	8"
60MM	T3.5-T22	1:1.8	12"
80MM	T1.9-T22	1:2.4	14.75"
90MM	T2.8-T22	1:2.5	16.5"
110MM	T2.0-T16	1:3.2	23"
150MM	T2.8-T22	1:4.5	40"

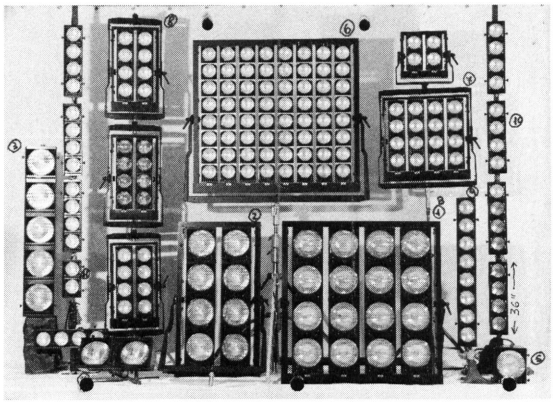
Changing framing without moving the camera, correcting perspective, excluding unwanted objects within the frame, removing reflections or altering the plane of focus, these are among the procedures possible with Shift and Tilt lens systems. The ARRI Shift and Tilt lens system consists of a rotatable, precision bellows focusing unit with a set of eleven lenses ranging from 18 mm to 150 mm, and a retro-lens adapter for extreme macro settings.

ARRI

Gonzo Filmmaking

into the atmosphere. "That scene was just agony to shoot," Pecorini recalls with a groan. "It was blazing hot, and we had to seal all of the equipment in plastic wrap to protect it. We had this group of about 20 bikers with us for three days, and we were constantly using two or three cameras. We had these amazing moments of total dust, where you would just see a shadow of something passing by. To keep the sand out of the lens, we used a rain deflector that operated with a little tank of air; there were a few hoses that you could mount on the edges of the matte box, and somehow they managed to keep most of the dust from coming in.

"At the height of the chaos, when Duke is aboard a jeep with a photographer named Lacerda, we had to shoot night-for-day because we ran out of time," he reveals. "It actually wasn't that difficult, because Fuller's Earth is the most amazing diffusion that you can have; I just lit up the dust with my Jumbo lights. There were some dailies of that footage that were really funny; sometimes the takes would go on a bit too long, and the special effects guys would cut off the Fuller's Earth, causing the scene to suddenly go from full sun to complete blackness!"



Pecorini's primary lighting tools on *Fear and Loathing* were a special series of fixtures manufactured by the Rome-based company Iride, which is run by Vittorio Storaro's longtime gaffer, Pippo Cafolla. Included among the array seen below are Jumbos (consisting of 16 600W or 1,000W bulbs), Mini-Jumbos (eight 600W or 1,000W bulbs), a DC1 (one 1,000W bulb) and DC5 (five 1,000W bulbs), and a series of Tornados (frames containing varying numbers of 650W Par 36 bulbs).

The filmmakers faced an entirely different challenge for stage-bound scenes involving Duke and Gonzo's visit to the Bazooko Circus, a phantasmagorical casino with a big-top theme. In the book, of course, these debauched scenes take place at the Circus Circus, a real-life gambling emporium; not surprisingly, the management of that establishment was less than eager to cooperate with the production, forcing Gilliam's team to create their own carnival of excess.

Exterior shots of the Bazooko's cartoonish entrance — a giant clown's head with a gaping grin — were filmed at the front doors of the Stardust hotel/casino in Las Vegas, while the fictional fantasyland's elaborate interior was constructed within a Warner-Hollywood soundstage. Production designer Alex McDowell was given free rein to produce a thoroughly over-the-top setting with two separate levels. The ground level consisted of a gambling floor, above which hung a safety net used by a team of aerial acrobats. McDowell's team also constructed a steep ramp leading up to a separate midway area featuring an array of outlandish carnival games and attractions. "To light the gambling floor, I mainly used rock 'n' roll truss rigs equipped with Par cans," Pecorini details. "I also had a few of my Jumbos working. I asked the best boy grip, Vidal Cohen, to mount them on the ends of these big metronome-like devices so that the light would move back and forth, bounce off various mirrors and travel all over the place. Each light had a different-colored gel on it as well, so it was really crazy.

"On the midway level, I put up some Par cans, but that area was lit mainly with practicals within each of the booths. I also used a lot of gelled Kino Flos and some China balls. The midway attractions were pre-existing games that we adapted for our own purposes, so there were already some limitations in terms of how we could light those. But I think limitations can be great sometimes, because they make your decisions easier!"

Pecorini's Steadicam expertise came in handy during the filming of the Bazooko scenes. "We didn't do that much Steadicam work on the rest of the film, but almost everything at the Bazooko Circus was done with Steadicam, because we really wanted to lend those scenes a feeling of craziness. We also didn't want the extras and all of the surroundings to be limited by the technicalities of the shoot; we never wanted the first A.D., Phil Patterson, and his seconds to have to tell the actors, 'Don't step on the tracks.' The great advantage of using Steadicam is that you can adapt to the shot or save the shot as things happen around you. Over the years, I've gotten very good at shoving people out of the way!"

Of course, no big-screen rendition of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* would be complete without the requisite interludes of copious chemical indulgence. In order to effectively convey the various altered states experienced by Duke and Gonzo, the filmmakers prepared a list of "phases" which detailed the cinematic qualities of each drug consumed by its lead characters. These substances include — but are hardly restricted to — ether ("loose depth of field; everything becomes non-defined"), adrenochrome ("everything gets narrow and claustrophobic, move closer with lens"), mescaline ("colors melt into each other, flares with no sources, play with color temperatures"), amyl nitrate ("perception of light gets very uneven, light levels increase and decrease during the shots"), and of course LSD ("expanded consciousness, everything extremely wide, hallucinations via morphs, shapes, colors and sound").

The most visual of these drugs, acid, was given some extra visceral impact with the help of some low-tech ingenuity. "We were originally going to use Clairmont Camera's 'squishy lens' for those sequences," Pecorini explains. "They took two lenses made of some

unbreakable material and sealed them at a certain distance from each other, filling the gap with optical liquid and adding three motors that could compress and distort the lens [see New Products, page 111]. Unfortunately, that lens wasn't available to us, so we came up with an alternative. We got some pieces of this material called Lexon, which is like Plexiglas, and the grips cut it into 6" by 6" squares and put it into a 6" by 6" filter frame attached to a swiveling matte box. We then used a gas-powered soldering gun to make dents in the Lexon. The result was an optical flat with a different texture in the middle. When we moved that [over the lens], certain areas of the image — a character's mouth, for example — would suddenly go soft; everything else would look normal except for that one spot. The idea came to me one day when I was looking at a piece of ordinary kitchen plastic wrap. If you make it really nice and tight it's like an optical flat, but if you rub your finger on it, it smudges. You can't control the effect so well with plastic wrap, but you can be very precise with Lexon.

"We used a lot of moving light during the acid sequences," he adds. "The lights were always going up and down and flashing and crashing. We also made liberal use of our colored gels. For example, the same window might have five different colors hitting it, but never at the same time; they would be fading in and out on the dimmer. Eric Erickson, my dimmer operator, would be playing his machine as if it were an organ! Sometimes we would both be working the dimmer simultaneously. One day we were all watching dailies of those scenes and Terry said, 'Is there a color we *didn't* use?'"

Despite the show's hell-bent 56-day schedule, frugal budget and difficult shooting conditions, Pecorini describes his *Fear and Loathing* experience as "a very important turning point" in his creative career. He emphasizes the fact that he owes a debt of gratitude to both Gilliam and his core crew members (camera operator Frank Perl, first camera assistant Steve Itano, B-camera first assistant Lucas Bielan, second assistant Hilton Goring, gaffer Chris Lyons, dimmer operator Eric Erickson, key grip Peter Chrimes and loader Forrest Thurman), and underscores the importance of staying open to new ideas during a shoot. "In my opinion, if the movie you get in the end is exactly what you thought it would be at the beginning, you didn't do a good job. A movie should surprise you and go much further than you've planned. The unpredictable can always play a wonderful part in a production; many times it will turn out better than you initially thought possible!" ■

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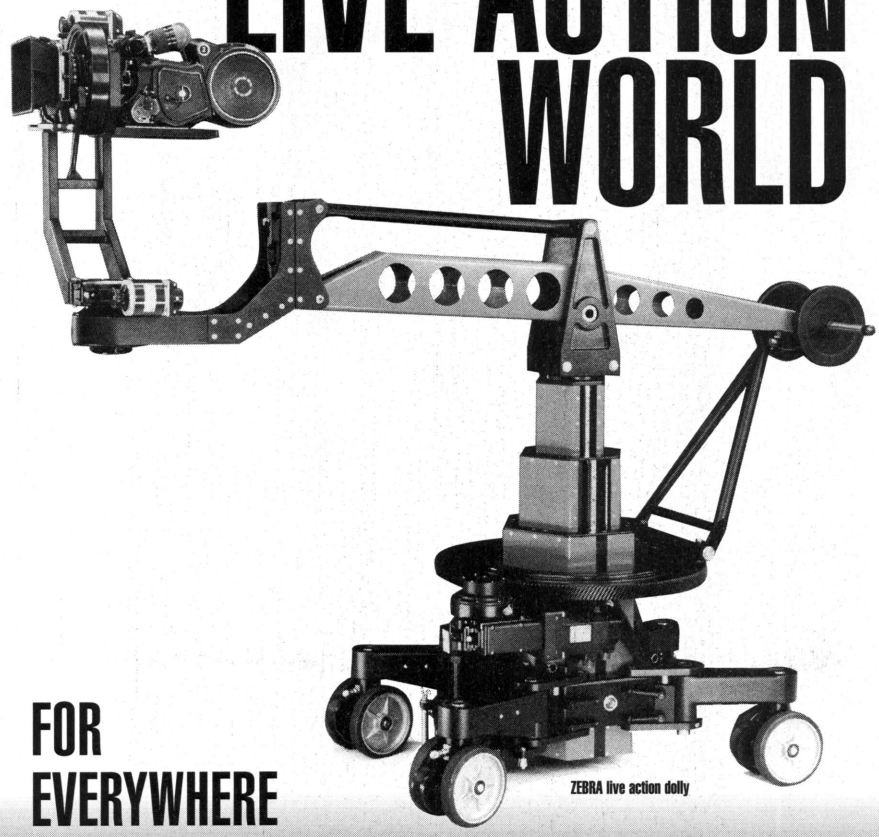

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Director Terry Gilliam applies his gleefully demented visual brilliance to the hallucinatory world of Hunter S. Thompson's infamous counterculture myth.

Interview by Stephen Pizzello
Photography by Peter Mountain

Unholy Grail

Over the years, scores of accomplished directors have seen their names attached to prospective productions of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,* but the project managed to elude Hollywood's finest for more than 25 years. The assignment to direct Hunter Thompson's book became an industry Grail of sorts, and many began wondering if this mirage would ever materialize on the silver screen.

The hunt finally ended in somewhat ironic fashion when the triumphantly eccentric Terry Gilliam (whose credits include, appropriately enough, the classic 1975 comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) signed up to bring Thompson's baroque visions to life.

Fear fans everywhere rejoiced at the announcement, since a more perfect marriage of director and material could hardly be imagined. A native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Gilliam graduated from Los Angeles' Occidental College before embarking on a career in magazine illustration at *Help!*, a sister publication of *Mad* magazine. He soon burst into

Photos courtesy of Universal Pictures.

prominence by contributing hilarious cut-out animation sequences to the classic English burlesque series *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* earning a British Academy Award for graphics in 1969. Since then, Gilliam has served up a banquet of consistently fantastic fare as a film director: the aforementioned *Holy Grail* (which he co-directed with fellow Python member Terry Jones), *Jabberwocky, Time Bandits, Brazil* (which garnered Oscar nominations for Best Screenplay and Art Direction and earned Gilliam Best Picture, Director and Screenplay honors from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association), *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (which earned four

Academy Award nominations, see *AC* March '89), *The Fisher King* (five more Oscar nominations) and *Twelve Monkeys* (see *AC* Jan. '96).

AC tracked down Gilliam as he was applying finishing touches to *Fear and Loathing* at a London recording studio, and found the director to be in a candid and jovial mood.

***American Cinematographer:* What was your reaction to *Fear and Loathing* when you initially read it?**

Gilliam: I'd read the book back in 1971, when it first came out. It really captured the times with an attitude that I could identify with. I thought it was incredibly funny and outrageous, but I simply read the book, enjoyed it and then didn't think about it for years. Ralph Steadman, who illustrated the text, is a friend of mine, and over the years he kept making noises about me doing a film version. In 1989, a script turned up which briefly got me excited about the book again, but I was busy with another project and I ultimately decided that the script didn't capture the story properly.

Last year, however, I was working on a project that seemed to be stumbling, and I got a call from Laila Nabulsi, who was producing a film version of *Fear and Loathing* [with Patrick Cassavetti]. Alex Cox had been set to direct the movie, but he was no longer involved and they were looking for somebody else. She sent me a script, and it reminded me of how funny and good the book was. I didn't really care for the script, but it inspired me to go back and read the book again, which is when my involvement really began in earnest. I brought on Tony Grisoni [*Queen of Hearts*] to co-write a script with me: the trick was to try to condense the book into a 100-page screenplay. That meant throwing out an awful lot of the book, so we tried to work very fast, using a sort of Gonzo screenwriting technique. We just pushed forward, never looking back, while trying to grab onto the most compelling stuff in the story.

Did the book inspire any immediate visual ideas?

Gilliam: We started building in visual ideas as we went along. For example, we began thinking about how to show the bats that descend upon Raoul Duke in one of his hallucinatory states. Right at the start I thought, 'Well, we can't show them in the sky, we can only show them inside Duke's eyeball.' So in the film we push in really tight on one of his eyes, where you can see these reflections of bats flapping around. We then cut to a wide shot that shows Duke waving his arms at nothing. I wanted to somehow convey that this was an *internal* problem. [Laughs.]

The book's major themes — nonconformity, political incorrectness, shaking up the Establishment — seem to be a perfect fit with the worldview that you've expressed through your own work. With the end of the millennium nearly upon us, did you see the movie as an antidote to the prevailing social climate of political correctness?

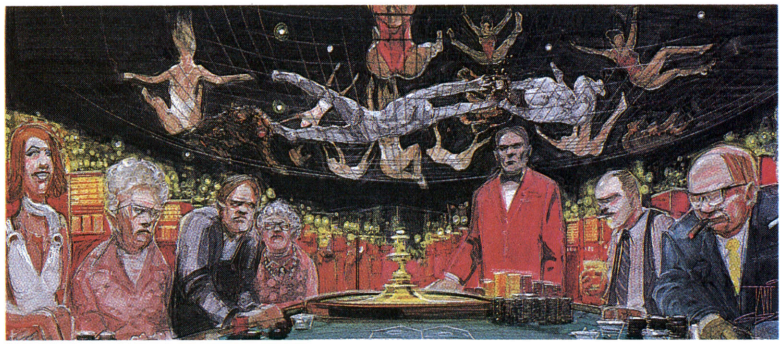
Gilliam: The script was sent to me at the end of the 1980s, and I was a bit drawn to the idea of making the film right then, because I thought to myself, 'Right, let's start the Nineties properly!' I was hoping the movie would sort of clear the air and allow us to start off a more interesting decade. I think the same intent is there today. I keep referring to the film as a 'cinematic enema for the Nineties.' [Big laugh.] Hopefully it will help to blow away some of the societal angst that's constricting us so much; everyone has become so cautious, careful, and frightened. We live in a very restrictive era: if you say anything that's deemed 'out of line,' you've suddenly got a dozen lawyers litigating against you.

Do you think that people today can still be stirred up by the book's message? Did you set out to outrage and provoke viewers?

Gilliam: Oh, yeah, that's the point of the book, and hopefully that's what we'll achieve with the

Gilliam consults with actor Johnny Depp, who prepared for the role of Raoul Duke by spending four months studying and perfecting the eccentric mannerisms of author Hunter S. Thompson.

Unholy Grail



This page: A production sketch by illustrator Tani Kunitake reveals the Bazooko Circus casino in all of its garish glory. Opposite page, center: Gilliam and assorted performers assemble on the Bazooko set, which was constructed within a Warner-Hollywood soundstage by production designer Alex McDowell and his crew. Ankle-deep in offal, Gilliam coaches Depp within the simulated wreckage of a Vegas hotel suite.

movie. In fact, one of the things that's been worrying me is whether or not we've been outrageous enough — we wanted to live up to the effect of the book. I hope that the right people will get angry.

What kinds of visual inspirations did you draw upon? Ralph Steadman's sketches and the garish trappings of Las Vegas would seem to be the obvious places to start.

Gilliam: Ralph's drawings are brilliant, and they really capture the book, but trying to translate two-dimensional pen-and-ink images into 3-D just doesn't work. I've been inspired by Ralph's work for many years, but it's so deep inside me that my first instinct was to throw it all away and not make specific references to his illustrations. For example, I didn't feel that we had to make our 'lounge lizards' look exactly like his drawings of them. I just approached the story from the storehouse of stuff I've got inside of me.

Did you reference any other sources for the film's visual style? When we've spoken in the past, you've mentioned that you often draw inspiration from art books or paintings.

Gilliam: We did reference the work of Robert Yarber, who paints these pictures of people inside hotel rooms in really fluorescent colors. His work is very strange and extraordinary, and the colors he uses are extremely vibrant. We used him as a guide while mixing our palette of deeply disturbing fluorescent colors. We really went all-out in terms of our color scheme and also our production design, which was headed up by Alex McDowell. We chose extreme colors that you wouldn't normally use.

Did you storyboard a lot of the movie?

Gilliam: Yes. I don't always do that, but I did on this film, particularly for scenes involving car shots or effects that needed to be integrated. For the car chase with the California Highway Patrolman, we had to have a second unit, so I storyboarded that sequence very carefully in order to give them a guide to work with.

What was the most difficult challenge of re-creating Las Vegas?

Gilliam: I think the most difficult part of it was having to actually work there! When we were shooting in the casinos, we were constantly restricted to very limited areas. We couldn't shut down the casinos, so we were typically given about six tables that we could put extras around. To make it worse, we had to have the extras gambling with real money! If they lost, the casinos got the dough!

Of course, we had to try to re-create Vegas in the early Seventies, and hardly any of that landscape remains today. That was one of the difficult things about the project, because we made this movie for very little money — somewhere in the neighborhood of $18.5 million. One of the reasons I made the film was to push myself and see if I could still work the way I used to: fast, furiously and cheaply. We made the film in Hollywood and Vegas with fully union crews, but we still managed to come in on a relatively low budget, which is incredible. We shot for about 56 days, which was pretty amazing considering what we had to do.

For instance, one of the book's key sequences takes place at the Circus Circus [hotel/casino], but for obvious reasons they wouldn't allow us to film there. Instead, we had to create our own casino called the Bazooko Circus. Our first night of shooting was in front of the Stardust [hotel/casino], where we had to wheel in this 20'-high clown's head. It would have been impossibly expensive to build the kind of neon canopy you see in Vegas, so we had to take advantage of what existed there and then add to it with our clown head. Luckily, we had won over the parking attendant in front of the casino! There were four lanes where cars came in and out, and we were allowed only two lanes at any given time. We found ourselves dancing around cars that were coming and going, and we could only use half of the casino's entrance to do our clown thing, while gamblers and tourists were using the other half. It was absolutely nightmarish to work that way, but somehow we pulled it off.

There are only a few casinos that have the period look we were after, and we often had to finish our shooting at a given location in one night. During one evening in particular, we had to go from the Plaza Hotel, where we did some exterior shots with a car, to Binion's Horseshoe, for a scene where the characters are registering at the Mint Hotel. That was part of a nightmare stretch covering three nights; on the first night, at the Stardust, we got an enormous amount of work done, but we were so exhausted by the next night that we could barely stand, and on the third night we were just the walking dead.

What led you to hire Nicola Pecorini as your director of photography?

Gilliam: I kept hearing good things about him, and then he sent me a show reel that was really funny and wonderful. Nicola's only got one good eye, and the show reel made all kinds of jokes about him being a one-eyed cameraman. I thought that anyone with that kind of intelligence and sense of humor had to be interesting, so we met, and we got along very well. I also saw a film he had shot called *Rhinocerous Hunting in Budapest* [see Sundance Film Festival coverage in *AC* April '97], which was very interesting even though it was made for practically nothing. I thought to myself, 'We're making a dangerous film, and I'm supposed to be pretending to be a young filmmaker again, going out and taking chances, so why not?

What kind of working relationship did you have on the set?

Gilliam: I worked very closely with both Nicola and first assistant director Phil Patterson, who had been a second assistant on *Twelve Monkeys.* They're both strong, passionate people who really helped me to bring it all together. We planned certain things, such as different looks that would correspond to different drugs, but a lot of it ended up being very instinctive.

Nicola is very smart, and he's had some incredible experiences working with people like Vittorio Storaro [ASC, AIC]. He's very fast on the floor, and he used these special Italian lights that Storaro's longtime gaffer [Pippo Cafolla] has built. They're very light and easy to deploy, and they go through a dimmer board, so we could mix them in various combinations and bring them up and down in the middle of a shot. There are a lot of shifting perceptions in the film, so the lights were shifting along with everything else.

I'm assuming that you shot quite often with your dearly beloved wide lenses.

Gilliam: Oh, absolutely! I think our standard lens was a 16mm, and we also used the 10mm and 14mm. Every now and then, of course, we'd do a long-lens shot with a 25mm! [Laughs.] I think I went wider on this show than I've ever done before; my standard lens used to be an 18mm. Hopefully, though, the wide-angle shots in the film won't look *too* extreme — you don't want the whole thing to become just a freak show. The distances between the characters and the camera became vital, because I didn't want things to get too funny-looking.

Above: Ankle-deep in offal, Gilliam coaches Depp within the simulated wreckage of a Vegas hotel suite.

You were working with the Super 35 format for the first time. Did you see any particular advantages or shortcomings to that choice?

Gilliam: Actually, I really enjoyed it. Because of all the scenes that take place in cars and in the desert, I felt that we needed to go widescreen. On a lot of my past films, I've been really keen on the use of verticality — placing people at the bottom of these great buildings, and so on — but Vegas wasn't like that. Things aren't very permanent or steady in Las Vegas, and we tried to capture that in the camerawork. This is probably the most dutched film ever made; I don't think there's a single shot where the horizon is

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Unholy Grail

straight, and we sometimes cut from one dutch angle to another in the same shot — just to make you feel as if the ground is constantly shifting beneath the characters.

Did you try to adopt the tenets of Gonzo journalism in your working methods on the film?

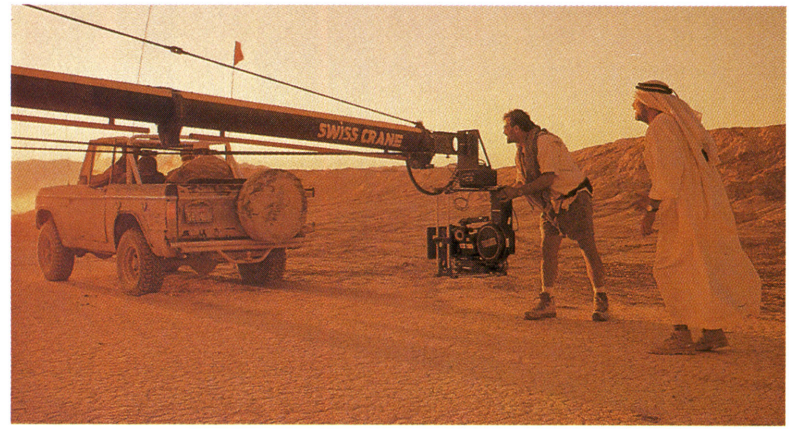
Gilliam: I suppose we did in the sense that we never looked back — we were like sharks, always moving forward, and no matter what happened, we couldn't go back and do things over again. I also shot with a looser frame than I usually use, because I wanted to give the actors some room when they were getting a bit out of control. Johnny Depp is an incredibly brilliant physical actor, and you want to see more of his body when he's moving: a simple head shot won't suffice. Even our close-ups are not from chin to forehead — they're almost mid-torso shots.

How did you handle the presentation of scenes in which the characters were indulging themselves with various chemical substances?

Gilliam: We started off with a bunch of theories about how to present those scenes, but we wound up doing a lot of it very instinctively. We didn't really distort too much in a lot of the drug scenes; many of them are surprisingly straightforward, but that's what's so disturbing about them. When we had to get weird we did, of course. We've done some things in post with points of view — such as printing four frames and then dropping four to give things a sort of jitter.

What led you to use animatronics instead of CGI in your presentation of the "lounge lizards"?

Gilliam: Well, [creature creator] Rob Bottin was so keen on participating in the project that he worked for a lot less money than he normally does! We did use a lot of CGI elsewhere in the film, but the animatronics were a way of getting through a room full of lizard people. We only had eight lizards for that scene, so we had to use some tricks to fill out the room, like doing multiple passes in a room full of mirrors so we could get reflections of reflections — real smoke-and-mirrors stuff.



Gilliam earned the nickname "Terry of Arabia" after donning a flowing bedouin robe during the production's dog days in the desert, where temperatures could reach 115°F. Here, the director and Pecorini position a remote arm with camera attached.

In some other scenes, we opted to use CGI — such as a sequence in which a reception clerk, played by Katherine Helmond, turns into a moray eel. During the shot, her neck begins to swell and her mouth changes shape.

The book has a bit of an existential bent, with political overtones. Did you use any symbolism to convey those aspects of the narrative?

Gilliam: The television is on all the time in the film, so you constantly get bits of news reports about

the war in Vietnam. It's a bit ironic: the story takes place in Vegas, and the only thing close to reality there is the television, which has always been the great distorter of reality!

One of the things that I don't think other scripts have captured about the book is its reflective nature. It's a book about loss: the Sixties didn't pay off the way Hunter obviously had hoped they would. The country was still deep in a war, and Nixon was in the White House. There's a beautiful passage in the book called the 'wave speech,' and we included that in the movie. Johnny, as Duke, is in his hotel room at night, and he goes over to the windows and opens the curtains; we then cut to documentary footage of the time, with no cleverness behind it. I'd originally considered using all of these effects, such as the room floating behind Duke and all of these images being projected onto the walls, but in the end I felt that it was better to just do it straight. Sometimes it's best *not* to be clever.

Hunter Thompson has a brief cameo in the film. What were your personal impressions of him?

Gilliam: He is exactly as he presents himself on the printed page; he's created his own persona. I would not want to live the way he has, but he's survived far beyond anyone else who has done those things to themselves. He's brilliant, a living icon, but he has to stand up to his reputation, which is hard work. He really is an extraordinary character.

When you're filming a book by an author who's still alive, there's a terrible pressure to get it right. But at the same time, you don't want to be too cautious and just do an earnest replication of the book. We were making a movie, and we had to make real choices. I felt an obligation to do *my* interpretation of the book. I didn't want to be restricted by thoughts of how Hunter would have done the book if he were a filmmaker. ■

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The Towering Challenge of Everest

The top of the world is conquered anew, this time by an intrepid team of filmmakers documenting the peak's majestic glory.

by Kathleen Fairweather

Photography by Robert Schauer

The mere mention of Mount Everest conjures up spectacular images of nature and extreme mountaineering that test the very limits of human endurance. To scale the world's highest peak, one has to be in prime condition and an expert climber. Ascending the apex means risking death by avalanche, severe oxygen deprivation, constant sub-zero temperatures, and unforgiving weather. The only task more difficult than surmounting Everest is making a movie about it, especially a 15-perf/65mm large-format film, which requires one of the heaviest cameras and a cinematographic style all its own.

Led by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker David Breashears in May of 1996, the Everest Film Expedition — a MacGillivray Freeman production in association with Arcturus Motion Pictures — set out to shoot the first 15-perf/65mm film atop Mount Everest, at the dizzying and deadly altitude of 29,028' above sea level.

Logistically, Breashears and his crew faced a cinematographer's worst nightmare. Besides shooting in sub-freezing temperatures with limited oxygen, the *Everest* team had to overcome the challenges of treacherous terrain, unpredictable and extreme weather, avalanches, and the

Photos courtesy of MacGillivray Freeman Films.

Gripping an Imax Mark II Lightweight camera, *Everest* filmmaker David Breashears prepares to shoot from within a crevasse in the Khumbu Icefall at about 19,000'.

sobering knowledge that over 150 people have perished while trying to make this most difficult ascent.

Technical travails compounded the danger as well. In order to adapt to the drastic physical climate, the large-format camera had to be heavily modified. A standard 15-perf/65mm camera weighs in at 80 pounds, not to mention the weight of the film: five pounds for a single 500' roll. (Some 113 rolls were shot during the filmmakers' springtime ascent.) Although Breashears had shot on Everest before, the notion of lugging a huge camera all the way to the top of the oxygen-starved summit (known as the "Death Zone") initially seemed a task more suited for some unknown breed of superhuman.

Reducing the camera's unwieldy weight was therefore crucial to the success of the expedition. Breashears and MacGillivray Freeman Films worked closely with the Imax Corporation's Kevin Kowalchuk and a team of engineers to build a custom lightweight camera Their finished instrument measured 11" x 11" x 10", utilized lighter-weight magnesium parts, and sported a 12-ounce motor which spins at 1,440 revolutions per minute to move the 65mm film at an incredible 5.6' per second. Known as the Imax Mark II Lightweight, this reconfigured camera weighs 48 pounds fully loaded.

In detailing his choice of this camera, *Everest* producer Greg MacGillivray offers, "I selected this camera to be modified for use on Mount Everest for the same reason that the Imax Corporation sends the Mark II up on the space shuttle, and why we select it to be mounted on the Blue Angels jets during supersonic flights: it is a very simple yet reliable piece of equipment — especially with the newly designed electronics."

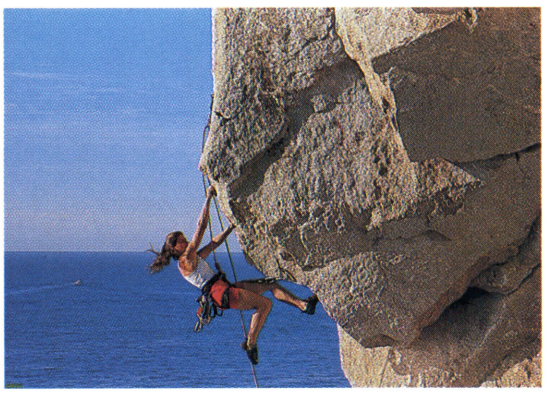
Along with the redesigned camera box came the elimination of a heavy flywheel mechanism and the addition of special cold-weather polyurethane drive belts to replace the less-flexible polyethylene ones. In addition, a lubricant that remains viscous at temperatures below -100°F was formulated and an important three-second ramp-up mechanism was designed to ease frozen film and motor gears up to speed without resulting in a film jam or break. Powered by a special six-pound, 32-volt lithium cell battery, the lighter-weight camera could now theoretically withstand temperatures well below freezing.

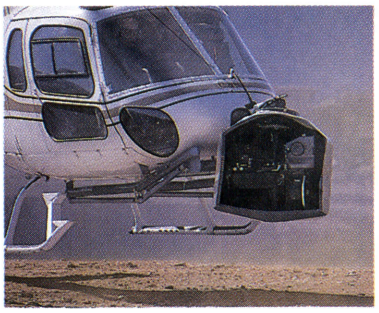
The extreme freezing temperatures affected the choice of film as well: the emulsion had to be pliable enough to withstand the cold, yet of a durability that would prevent tears during the filming process. Breashears and MacGillivray ultimately selected Kodak's tear-resistant Estar-backed film, a mylar-based emulsion designed for high-speed cameras. Details Breashears, "We conducted a number of tests with the camera and film in a cold chamber set at temperatures of -40 and -50°F. Because the film goes through the camera so fast, the perforations in 65mm film are prone to tearing. In our 24-hour cold-chamber test, the film remained pliable. However, this is a double-edged sword: the film is durable and tough, but if anything goes wrong, it can damage the camera. With acetate-backed film, which is less durable, if the film breaks and loses tension, the camera just stops. But the advantages [of using the Estar-backed stock] far outweighed the disadvantages. We never had a problem with the film breaking or snapping."

Further cinematographic innovations included taking advantage of the gyrostabilized Spacecam aerial camera system. MacGillivray Freeman Films mounted the SpaceCam system to an A-star helicopter to film difficult high-altitude sequences otherwise unobtainable in the 15-perf/65mm format. According to Ron Goodman, designer of the

The Towering Challenge of Everest

SpaceCam system and cameraman for one of the aerial sequences, *Everest* was the first full-length Imax film to utilize the SpaceCam. He notes, "Up until now, filmmakers working in this format have not been





Above: A Spacecam shot of Araceli Segarra climbing several hundred feet above the Pacific Ocean in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. (Actual 70mm film frame.) Right: A close-up of the SpaceCam system mounted with the Imax/MSM 9801 camera rig.

afforded the same quality of aerial equipment that people who produce feature films and television commercials take for granted. The main reason is that the size and weight of the equipment is much greater. The reason the SpaceCam works so well with the 15-perf/65mm format is that the gyros and servos involved have much more strength than other gyrostabilized systems, and are able to cope with the extra mass.

"Moreover, since a lot of large-format projects use very wide-angle lenses — especially the 180-degree, 30mm lens used in Omnimax films — it's very difficult to provide an unobstructed field of view. With the SpaceCam, the entire front of the enclosure is open, so you can use a 30mm lens without seeing the housing. The SpaceCam is a totally open system because the gyros and servo systems are strong enough to withstand wind loading and the weight of the camera. Additionally, this design allows air pressure to act as a barrier to turbulent air approaching the front of the enclosure."

In the spring of 1995, Breashears organized an expedition to Everest's Nepal side to test the modified Imax Mark II camera (see *AC* August '95), only to discover that the camera couldn't be loaded while one wore gloves — presenting both a challenge and hardship for anyone working in sub-freezing temperatures. Breashears reports, "I was the one loading the film. At 27,000', your thinking is affected due to the lack of oxygen. I had this freezing metal box to put my hand into, and it's a very elaborate mechanism that the film had to be threaded through. I had a deep, overriding concern that a piece of lint or anything else in a camera that will ultimately be projected on an 80' screen could be ruinous to the image. I didn't want to have some of the most hard-won footage in the history of filmmaking end up being unusable because of dirt or hair in the gate.

"You just don't pick up this camera and start shooting," Breashears adds. "It takes many people to move the camera and equipment, and it takes time to set up every shot. Also, you have to be very careful when shooting, because each 500' roll lasts only 90 seconds. Filming on Everest is much harder than climbing Everest. In general, there's a risk involved, but we didn't put ourselves in dangerous positions. What looks risky to some observers doesn't necessarily mean that it's dangerous."

According to Breashears, the most arduous shots up on the mountain were the camera moves utilizing long lenses of 250mm or 500mm. Just as a hair in the gate would be magnified on an Imax screen, any mistakes or operator errors in the camera moves are very noticeable in the 15-perf/65mm format. Breashears relates, "It's difficult enough just trying to tilt and pan the camera while you are tired and breathing hard at 27,000 plus feet, while ensuring that everything is in the right place and working properly. In addition, our job was never done: we were up in the evenings talking about shots, downloading film, cleaning the camera, repairing the camera, writing shot lists, recording dialogue, and preparing. During the day, we were constantly looking for good shots, trying to make the proper decisions: Is it safe to stop here? Is this good light? Do I demoralize the team by stopping too many times? By stopping to get this shot, do we lose good light up higher, or risk not reaching camp? It was clear from the beginning that if we succeeded, it would be one of the epic achievements in Himalayan filmmaking."

Despite the lighter camera load, other obstacles also awaited. Transporting the equipment up and down the mountain was an enormous logistical task. The production required that every piece of equipment, including food and shelter, be conveyed by helicopter from Khatmandu to Lukla, and then carried by more than 50 Sherpas and 100 yaks on a two-week ascent to a base camp located at an altitude of 18,000'.

The expedition's other experts included a number of leading mountaineers: Ed Viesturs; veteran Austrian climber/cinematographer Robert Schauer; Spain's Araceli Segarra (who became the first Spanish woman on the summit); Japan's Sumiyo Tsuzuki; and Jamling Norgay, the son of Tenzing Norgay, one of the first men to climb Mount Everest. Geophysicist Roger Bilham joined the team at base camp with the aim of deploying global positioning satellite receivers to measure earthquake movement high up on the slope, a goal he accomplished.

Up on the mountain, however, the filmmaking team first

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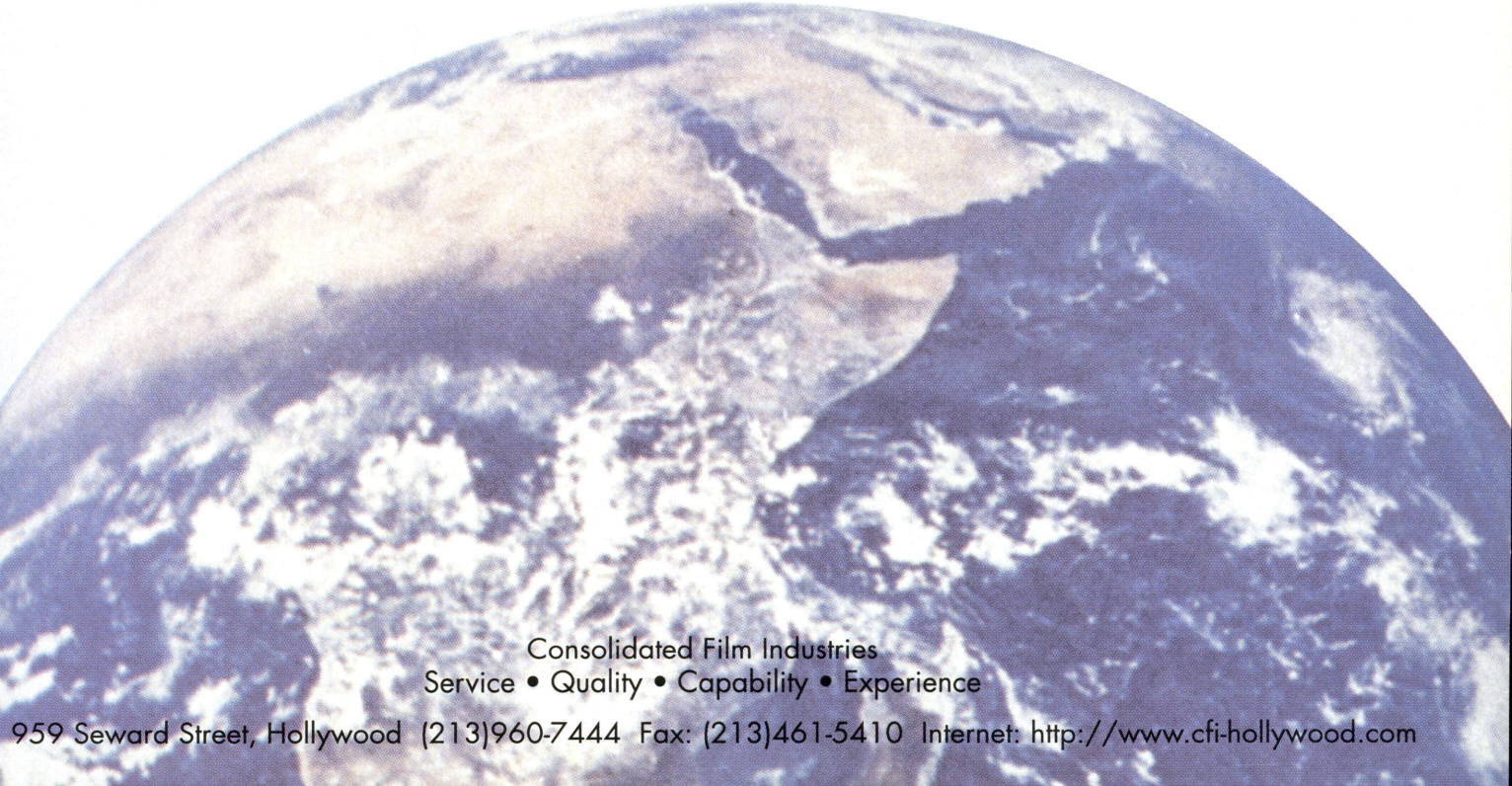

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The Towering Challenge of Everest

had to acclimatize to the lack of oxygen, the unpredictable weather, and each other. Breashears sometimes found that he had to forsake the goals of the film in order to manage a team of climbers accustomed to autonomy. He recalls, "On some days I would have to make the decision to just let the climbers climb, and not interrupt their rhythm."

The flexible shooting schedule also compounded the fact that the crew had no script supervisor to ensure continuity. If scenes were shot on one day and then continued on another, the team would have to recapture the same light and re-create the climber's exact placement from the previous day's shoot. And since there were no dailies to watch and check for consistency, the team would have wait until 10 days after footage was shot and viewed by the company to find out if the material was usable.

Breashears films Sumiyo Tzusuki crossing a dangerous crevasse in the Khumbu Icefall.

On May 10, 23 people from four other climbing expeditions set out to conquer the peak. High winds had kept the *Everest* team back at camp, waiting to advance on a different day. While at camp, the *Everest* team got word of an emergency at the top: one of the mountain's dangerous storms had moved in on the summit, trapping climbers from another team high up on the peak.

The storm raged into the night with temperatures of -100°F, leaving the climbers stranded, fatigued and running out of oxygen. The *Everest* team and other crews immediately coordinated a rescue, and members of the *Everest* unit volunteered their expertise, oxygen and supplies to aid the climbers' descent.

A daring helicopter rescue by pilot Colonel Madan K.C., who helmed *Everest*'s aerial shoot, ultimately saved some of the climbers. This courageous act was also extremely dangerous, since the air at those elevations can be too thin to provide an adequate lift for helicopters. Despite these heroic actions, eight people died overnight amid the mountainous landscape. *[Ed. note: This tragic event was widely reported and later chronicled in the books* Everest: Mountain Without Mercy, *by Broughton Coburn and Tim Cahill, which details the* Everest *production; and* Into Thin Air, *written by Jon Krakauer, a member of one of the other climbing teams.]*

Emotionally and physically drained, the *Everest* team pressed on, replacing the 25 bottles of oxygen and supplies used during the rescue. On May 21, the winds had died down and the group returned to camp with renewed optimism. MacGillivray offers, "If our team had felt that they did not want to go up, I absolutely would have understood and supported them in their decision. We had the budget to return the next year if we had to. David and the others were upbeat about the favorable change in the weather. Despite the heartache they all felt after losing several close friends, they drew strength from the support of their team and from people who followed the events on the mountain from all over the world."

Adds Breashears, "It's very hard for people to imagine what our team accomplished in the face of adversity and tragedy. We had a credo that we would never admit to ourselves that what we were attempting to do was impossible. We brought cameras to a place where people would cut their toothbrushes in half to save weight."

On Wednesday, May 22, 1996, the *Everest* climbers launched their final assault on the summit. More than 10 hours later — after battling treacherous ice, fatigue and oxygen deprivation — the team made it to the top. Breashears recalls that summit day: "The two shots that were the hardest to execute are both in the film. We'd been climbing through the night and we were very tired. We hardly slept for over 50 hours, had just a little bit to eat and drink and were hypoxic. The sun came up and we were on the southeast ridge at 27,600'. It was -25 or -30°F, and we had to stop to assemble the camera and then load it up barehanded. When you put up a camera that uses 5.6' of film per second, you have to do it just right.

"Since we could not use our tripod — an O'Connor 2575 that weighed 75 pounds — we took a monopod, which at three to four pounds weighed a lot less. Balancing a 42-pound camera on a monopod in the wind at 29,028' wasn't easy. Robert Schauer wedged up underneath the camera and we checked the exposure, focus, and frame rate, and then checked it again. We had one roll of 500', which equaled 90 seconds of film to be shot at the top of Everest. It would have been heartbreaking to reach the top and have the camera malfunction or experience an operator error. As it turned out, however, we used every frame of that footage in the finished film."

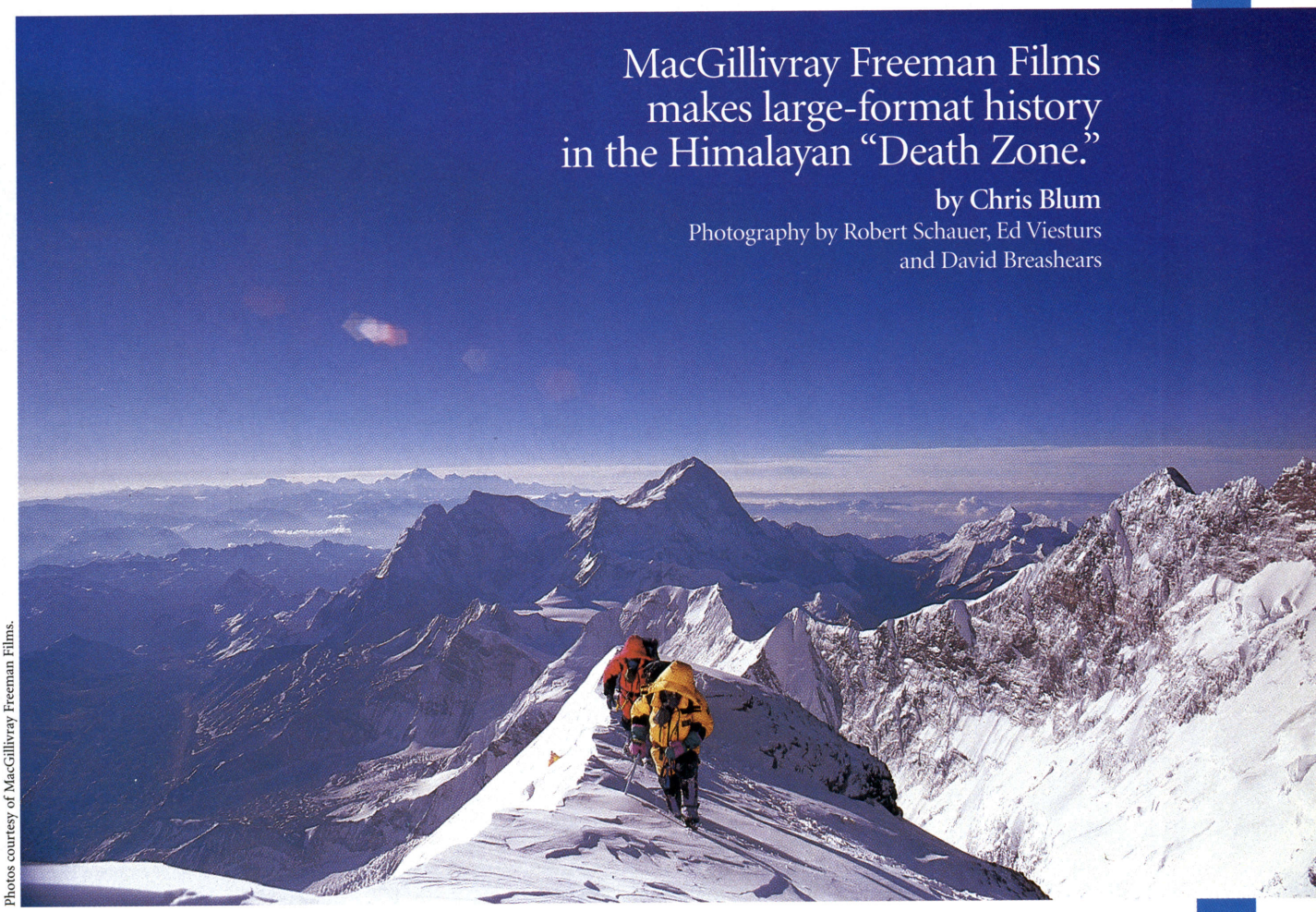
Asked to compare the trials of filming 35mm footage for a feature such as *Titanic* 12,378' below the ocean to that of shooting *Everest* 29,028' above sea level, Breashears responds with a wry chuckle. Recalling the *Titanic* film crew's complaints about being submerged in a temperature- and oxygen-controlled environment, he quips, "I wish we'd had it so easy." ■

Touching the Edge of Heaven

MacGillivray Freeman Films makes large-format history in the Himalayan "Death Zone."

by Chris Blum

Photography by Robert Schauer, Ed Viesturs and David Breashears



Photos courtesy of MacGillivray Freeman Films.

Beautiful as they are, the large-screen images of *Everest* do not accurately depict the incredible stresses put on the film's creators by the high altitudes of the world's tallest peak. *AC* recently spoke with three key members of the crew that carried a 15-perf/65mm Imax camera into the so-called "Death Zone" above 26,000' — where the human body and mind are equally numbed by brutal cold and a lack of oxygen.

David Breashears is a veteran mountaineer and filmmaker who in 1996 became the first person to direct and photograph an Imax feature film on Mount Everest. The previous year, the filmmaker and his team had scaled Everest's slopes in Nepal to field-test a newly designed Imax Mark II Lightweight cold-weather camera — which weighs in at 48 pounds with battery and 500' magazine.

Robert Schauer assisted with filming on the mountain and summit and also served as the expedition's still photographer; he is the founder and director of the international Mountain and Adventure Film Festival in Graz, Austria.

Brad Ohlund has worked in

Touching the Edge of Heaven

Previous page: Araceli Segarra and Jamling Norgay at 28,000', working their way up the Southwest Ridge toward the summit of Everest. (Actual 70mm film frame.) Below: Breashears and the Sherpa camera team set up for a shot on Lhotse Face at 25,000'.

the 15-perf/65mm format for over 20 years. He went to the Everest base camp in 1996 as the Imax camera technical and photographic consultant for MacGillivray Freeman Films.

American Cinematographer: **How was making this film different from other films that you've made on Everest?**

Breashears: It is such a huge difference that it's difficult to describe. I have had 16mm cameras fairly high on Everest, but never to the summit. I've had small video cameras up there [see *AC* Dec. '83, which details Breashears' successful live video report from the summit], but a videocassette lasts at least 20 minutes, and 400' of 16mm film lasts 11 minutes. With Imax, 30 seconds of film — one shot — was ⅓ of the [500'] roll. That fact proved to be a great discipline, because we would only put up the camera and shoot scenes that we were very certain could be used in the final cut. We made sure that the climbers knew what to do in that shot, how to move, where to move, and what speed to move at. We would rehearse the camera move several times, but we could not rehearse the movements of the climbers, because they were climbing at high altitudes.

I returned to Everest in 1997 to photograph a PBS documentary, and shot on the mountain with video. Initially, I had a hard time taking the whole thing seriously — being there with this little 2 ½-pound camera that can record for an hour on a cassette. [While shooting *Everest*] in 1996, there was a certain glamour and romance that we felt — a real sense of mission with the Imax camera and the way it used all that film up: 500' in 90 seconds. In 1997, what I really realized was that what we'd done in 1996 should have been impossible. What we had going for us in 1996 was a very important thing called 'the motivation of uncertainty.' It was the unknown, it was the joy and reward of being first, and there was the uncertainty of 'Could we do it?' With the Imax camera, we were highly motivated because some people did not think we could do it. We *thought* we could do it, but we did not *know* we could do it. We would be the first. A lot of people thrive in such an environment, and it brings out the best of their character — their desire to excel and do well.

You filmed during the trek up to the Everest base camp, but how did the difficulty of filming, both physically and psychologically, increase when you actually began the assault on the peak?

Ohlund: On the trip up to base camp, you are doing some serious trekking, but when you pass the village of Loboche you pass the 17,000' line and the difference is palpable. The air is so much thinner and the environment is considerably more harsh. At that altitude, you experience a great loss of motivation and energy — you have difficulty just breathing. While setting up the camera, everybody was huffing and puffing, including the experienced mountaineers; David and Robert were huffing and puffing just as much as I was. Getting even just a couple of shots a day was pretty remarkable at those altitudes.

Breashears: All of the problems of filming at high altitude basically come down to the fact that you are not getting enough oxygen in your blood — it is not only exhausting, but it inhibits your mental functioning. You also lose your motivation, so it becomes very important to operate as a team; left to your own devices, you might not feel like continuing.

Schauer: One of the most important ways to keep accidents from happening when we were fiming high on Everest was to check each other — we always had to double-check, or cross-check. I checked what David was doing and he would check what I was doing, because you never know if your concentration or your ability to do something correctly at that moment is impaired. Because of the speed of the 65mm film running through the gate [at 5.6' per second] it is really something when you have a malfunction — luckily we only had one bad film jam.

You had a very small camera

team high on the mountain — essentially just David and Robert. What was the thinking behind this coupling?

Schauer: One of the main reasons that I came along was to film in case something happened to David. I had to pay really close attention to the framing, camera moves, and actor motions, which had to be done in a different way than you usually do in 16mm or 35mm due to the format.

Breashears: Robert Schauer was one of the most indispensable members of the team. Not only had he climbed Everest before, but he is also a talented cinematographer. Everyone on this team had to have a backup — that was very important to me and to Greg [MacGillivray]. If I got a chest infection, sprained my ankle, or worse, Robert was perfectly capable of taking over the shooting and directing of the film on the mountain. I was always showing him the basic parameters of shooting in the Imax format, although he did not have the advantage I had of seeing the dailies from our 1995 test shoot. Even if I woke up on summit day and had a bad stomach, I would have said, 'Robert, it's in your hands.' I couldn't be in the position of faltering and having no one there to do the key things — compose a good picture, set the exposure, and focus. At least we would get usable images.

How did things go on the actual summit day?

Schauer: Before leaving for the summit we were really well-prepared for everything and had already done some filming on the South Col. [At 26,000', this is the standard route to the summit, popular since Sir Edmund Hillary first reached the top in 1953.] By that point we were pretty much into our procedure. Of course, it's really easy to describe the situation now, but it was really difficult to do so under the stress of a hypoxic [lack of oxygen] and hypothermic situation, with some-

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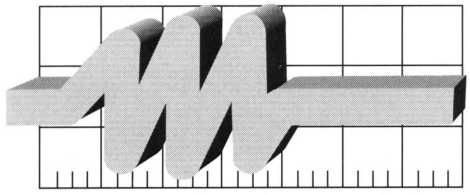

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Touching the Edge of Heaven

Araceli Segarra crosses a crevasse in the Khumbu Icefall. (Actual 70mm film frame.)

what impaired judgment and a lack of motivation. When we reached the summit, David and I were so highly concentrated on the filming that we forgot to celebrate our arrival there.

Breashears: At that point in the expedition, everything that Robert, the Sherpas and I were doing was instinctive — finding a level place to attach the camera pack safely and not have the camera roll down the mountain, handing lenses to one another in a very safe manner. It was all very unspoken up there, so we had a laminated checklist on summit day to make sure — in our sleep-deprived, hypoxic, and dehydrated state — that we didn't forget something simple.

You relied on the abilities of your Sherpa camera crew to help out when necessary — how did this work out, especially high on Everest?

Ohlund: The Sherpas on our team were amazing. Because they have thicker blood than we do, they can function at higher altitudes much better than a Westerner can. Even a strong Westerner has a handicap next to a Sherpa. The Sherpas don't have to acclimatize the way we do, and they have much more strength and stamina than we have. Within just a few days of watching us shoot, they would know where everything was and what it was for. We could be in complete trekking mode — with the camera, head, tripod, et cetera in backpacks — and from the time David said, 'Let's do a shot here,' they would have the whole camera set up in five to six minutes.

Climbing Mt. Everest is hard enough in itself. Making a film along the way is not only a great deal more difficult, but would seem to add many more risks to an already dangerous endeavor.

Breashears: Any time that you do something as distracting as filming with an Imax camera on Mt. Everest, you're increasing the level of danger. This happens whenever you are not able to focus purely on climbing. The real dangers on Everest are objective dangers such as a collapsing ice tower in the Khumbu Icefall, or a stone fall down the Lhotse face. It's harder [for such objects] to hit a moving target, and a film crew just *sits* there. We can be in one place for an hour getting ready, so we are exposed to more of these objective dangers. However, in some ways film crews operate within safer parameters, since they are so methodical and always have to be thinking about the time of day and the light. We can't say, 'Lets keep going and it will get dark and we'll get down late,' because we need light to film. We would rather turn back, since our mission was to make sure we had reasonable weather and good light — we could not go climbing and filming on really crummy days.

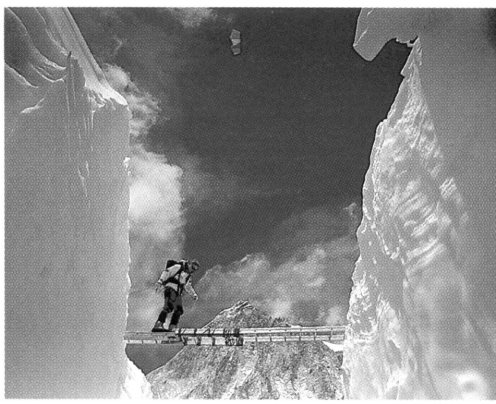
David and Brad returned to Nepal in December 1996 to film aerials. Are there any interesting stories about this?

Ohlund: We used the village of Lukla at 9,000' as our base of operations. One of the interesting things was the number of rescues we made in the course of filming — about every other day we were flying a person down from someplace in the Khumbu Valley. Ours was the only helicopter in the region at the time.

Breashears: While we were in the air, our pilot, Colonel Madan K.C., got rescue calls. He'd put me down, I'd off-load all the camera gear, and then he'd take off for an hour to rescue altitude-sick trekkers and drop them at Lukla.

Ohlund: Helicopters do not go up into the Khumbu on a regular basis; it is not a very hospitable place for helicopters, because the air is very thin and you can't get too much lift. And if you have to set down for any reason, you may not be able to contact anyone. The most dangerous aspect of the filming was that if we had ever had to set down anywhere above 14,000', the crew would have been in serious jeopardy. One of the reasons that we used a military helicopter was to have the ability to communicate back to Katmandu. If you set down in some deep gorge or valley, though, the radio may not work for you.

Breashears: For the highest-altitude filming of Everest and Lhotse, at 27,000', we used a fixed-wing, single-engine Pilatus Porter. I set up the camera inside and anchored myself down with all sorts



of climbing straps and harnesses. When we crossed the Lhotse-Nuptse ridge, I slid open the door to a deafening rush of -40°F wind. To keep the lenses from fogging, the pilot kindly agreed to turn off the heat, which meant that we could keep the door open for only three minutes at a time. At one point I needed to adjust the tripod without my mittens, and the skin on my hands instantly turned bone white. To keep the plane's wing out of the frame, I had the pilot bank the plane 30 degrees and apply full-right rudder, allowing the plane to crab sideways. It was shuddering from the stress.

In the August 1995 *American Cinematographer* story about the field-test expedition, David said, "Barring bad weather, deep snow, or sick crew members, we will make it happen; we will reach the top." Please reflect on this statement today, especially in light of the tragedy that occurred during the 1996 shoot [a total of eight people

from other expeditions died when a sudden storm blew in and trapped climbers on the mountain].

Breashears: A lot of things went wrong [on that climb], and no one would have faulted us for leaving that mountain after the tragedy. Although many things seemed to conspire against us, we still had tremendous faith in our team, and the various individuals had confidence in their own abilities. We really felt the importance of our mission, and there were two basic objectives: the filmmaking side and the pure desire and dream of a mountaineer to reach the summit. When we went back up, I had three great fears about filmmaking on summit day. First, I was worried that the filmmaking team would get strung out in such a way that the camera body, magazine and battery would never be in the right place when [climbers] Jamling and Araceli were in place, thus forcing us to keep climbing. On summit day you cannot stop and wait. The second concern was mist or clouds. We were climbing late in May, and the moist air was beginning to come in from the Bay of Bengal — on some mornings it would quickly cloud over. In 1985, I climbed Everest and I couldn't see 20'. God forbid being on top of the world's highest mountain with an Imax camera and nothing to shoot! The third worry was that we would have a camera failure. The [Mark II Lightweight] camera had performed brilliantly for 90 days, and there were just a few days left — it would have been heartbreaking if the camera had broken down. At 11 o'clock the night before summit day, I made a difficult decision: to leave the video camera behind. Everest had already been filmed very well on video. We were still feeling the tragedy very strongly, and we had worked so hard to get the Imax camera there that to rely too heavily on the video would have been a tremendous diminishment of what we had set out to do. ■

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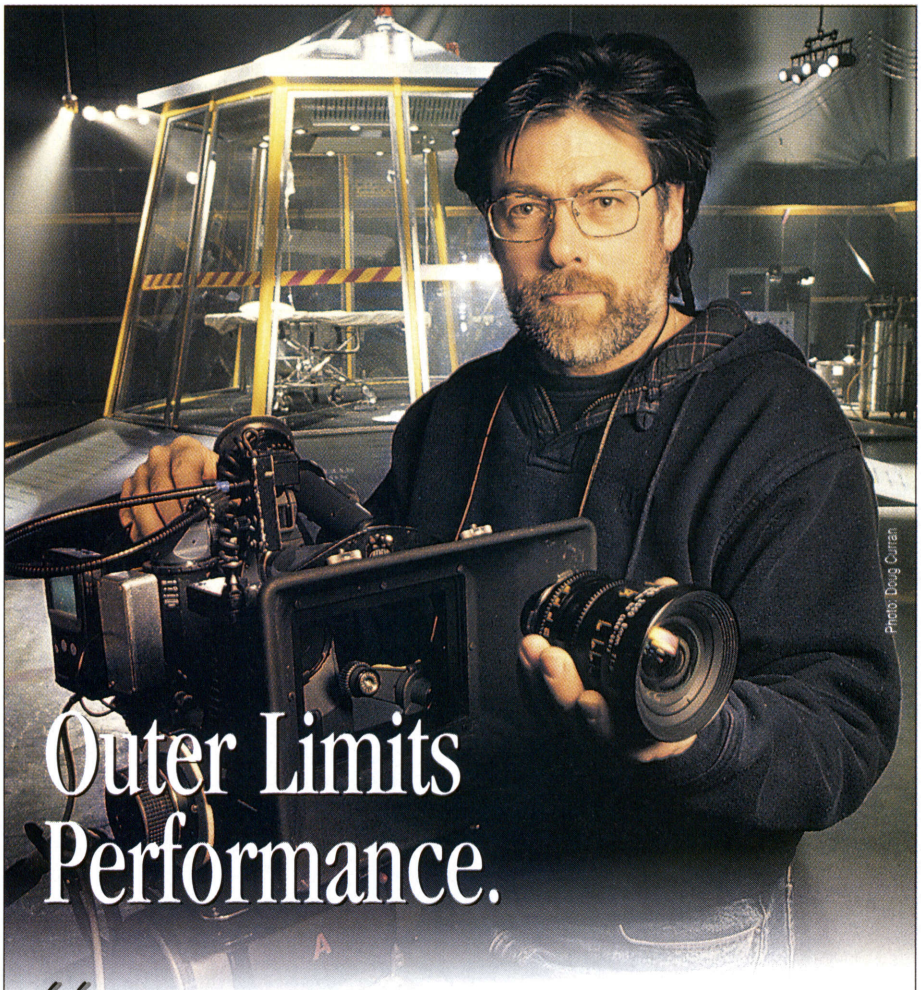

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Bravura Broadcasts

The American Society of Cinematographers salutes 1997's finest television artistry.

by Christopher Probst

With each passing year, television's top directors of photography continue to close the gap between projects shot for television and those tailored for the big screen. Increased improvements in film emulsions, better telecine transferring capabilities and these artists' fierce devotion to their work have raised the benchmark of standard "TV fare" to a pinnacle that sometimes rivals the look of even the highest-budgeted features.

Many of the form's finest practitioners were feted at the American Society of Cinematographer's 12th Annual Outstanding Achievement Awards celebration, held on March 8 at the Century Plaza hotel in Los Angeles. The audience included 1,400 of their industry associates, as well as many fellow directors of photography. Each of the 13 nominees for Best Cinematography in the television medium exhibited passion and artistry with their respective works, as well as a commitment to visual excellence.

Miniseries

Alan Caso*
George Wallace

First-time ASC Award nominee and recipient Alan Caso began his career by establishing himself as one of the industry's top Steadicam operators on such productions as *Romancing the Stone, The Hunt For Red October* and *The Arrival.* As a director of photography, Caso has compiled credits in both television (*Black Out, Summer of Fear, Tonya and Nancy* and 20 episodes of the series *Raven*) and on features (*Ed, The Stepfather III, In the Midnight Hour* and *Top of the World*).

George Wallace, which chronicles the tumultuous life of the controversial Alabama governor, reunited the cinematographer with director John Frankenheimer. Caso had previously worked with Frankenheimer as an operator on the feature *52 Pickup,* and had admired the director's integrity and sensitivity to characters, as well his attention to the authenticity of a film's setting.

Spanning 20 years, the miniseries depicts Wallace's life via a combination of archival footage — gathered from multiple sources in multiple formats — and the filmmakers' re-creation of Alabama's racial struggles during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Critical to the integration of the newsreel material — which was either 16mm or Kinescope footage — was the creation of a look that was both effective in telling Wallace's life story over the course of several eras and compatible with the archival footage of the real Wallace. Early on, the filmmakers decided to shoot

12th Annual ASC Awards Television Nominees

Miniseries

Alan Caso *
George Wallace

David Franco
Intensity

Kees Van Oostrum, ASC
Medusa's Child

Movie of the Week or Pilot

Shelly Johnson
Louisa May Alcott's The Inheritance

Jacek Laskus
The Garden of Redemption

Bing Sokolsky
Oliver Twist

Mike Southon, BSC
Snow White: A Tale of Terror

William Wages, ASC *
Buffalo Soldiers

Regular Series

James R. Bagdonas, ASC
Chicago Hope, "Hope Against Hope"

Billy Dickson
Ally McBeal, "Silver Bells"

Jonathan Freeman
Prince Street, "God Bless America"

Robert McLachlan, CSC
Millennium, "Thin White Line"

Marc Reshovsky *
3rd Rock from the Sun,
"Nightmare on Dick Street"

* Denotes winner.

Photo by David E. Williams

Back row, left to right: David Franco, Awards Committee Chairman Bud Stone, Janusz Kaminski, ASC; Russell Carpenter, ASC; Billy Dickson, Robert McLachlan, CSC; Awards Committee Co-Chairman Owen Roizman, ASC. Second row, left to right: William Wages, ASC (far left with hands folded); Jacek Laskus, Marc Reshovsky, Alan Caso, James Bagdonas, ASC; Bing Sokolsky. Front row, left to right: Lin Dunn, ASC; Society President Woody Omens, ASC; Freddie Francis, BSC; Victor Kemper, ASC; Albert Maysles.

Wallace in both color and black-and-white for select sequences. For the color footage, Caso elected to use Eastman Kodak EXR 5298, pushing the stock two stops while overexposing by ⅔ of a stop to effectively degrade the imagery and simulate the look of the archival footage. The black-and-white segments were rendered on Double-X 5222, which was also pushed to degrade the quality of the images to that of a "film that has been on a shelf for 15 years."

After extensive testing, Caso decided to utilize bleach-bypass processing on the internegative to further desaturate colors and heighten the contrast. However, this technique also affected the black-and-white footage, which sometimes had to be flashed upwards of 30 percent during initial capture to bring the contrast down.

Both Caso and director Frankenheimer had specific ideas about the use of camera movement in *Wallace*. The cinematographer often utilized a jib arm on a dolly as his main A-camera platform — freeing the camera from a more fixed, tied-down perspective — and also made heavy use of a Steadicam, which was operated by David Crone. Caso used an Arriflex 535B for most of the A-camera material, and a Moviecam Compact for the Steadicam work. He employed Zeiss lenses for their contrast, sharpness and slightly cooler quality.

Frankenheimer also wanted to hold very deep focus, and staged action in several layers to add depth to the frame. The filmmakers used mostly wide-angle lenses ranging in length from 18mm to 28mm; close-ups were generally shot with a 35mm or 50mm lens. Caso often lit sequences at a stop of between T5.6 to a T8.5 to obtain enough depth to hold focus from 18 inches to deep in the backgrounds. The director of photography also notes that Frankenheimer wanted the piece to be moody, but sought to avoid a typical "period" look, opting instead for a visual style that was strong and effective but not overly "self-conscious."

David Franco
Intensity

"There are shorter production schedules in the realm of television, but I'm rarely the one who suffers the most because of it," submits David Franco, who earned his third ASC Award nomination with the miniseries *Intensity*. "I think it's the director who suffers. In the end, a lighting setup takes about the same amount of time. Since I've been doing television films, I've never really had to compromise what I've wanted to do. Actually, I think you have much more freedom now in television than in the past, when some people weren't able to do what they wanted to."

Franco was nominated for an ASC Award in 1994 for the miniseries *Million Dollar Babies* (see *AC* May '95) and then in 1995 for the MOW *Falling for You* (*AC* May '96). His other television credits include *Free Money*, *The Assignment*, *Silent Trigger*, *Trial by Vengeance*, *Soul Survivor*, *The Carpenter*, *Model By Day* and *Hollow Point*.

Intensity was the first time Franco worked with director Yves Simoneau, but the cinematographer was familiar with his work. "Yves is from Quebec, and I had lived in Quebec for a while, so we knew of each other beforehand. When he got the project, he called me up and we ended up shooting the film together in Vancouver. Yves is a very visual and has strong ideas about how a film should be shot. I generally prefer working with directors who have strong visual ideas than those who give you a completely open frame in which to work. Having a strong director visually only means that you can take things higher than if you start from ground zero."

Over half of *Intensity* takes

place inside a recreational vehicle "during the pre-dawn twilight, right before the sun comes up but when you still have light in the sky," explains Franco. "Since we were shooting in Vancouver in the fall, almost every day was cloudy and overcast, so we were able play things as 'magic hour' shots almost all day long. I shot on tungsten-balanced film without any correction and underexposed quite a bit. There was a lot happening in the RV itself, so we had another RV in the studio that we cut into; we did a lot of poor-man's process, because shooting in rainy Vancouver was a bit taxing on the schedule.

"I take a very naturalistic approach when it comes to lighting, so I tend to play the light through the windows," he adds. "When we had a few night sequences, I actually played the night much warmer than the day, because all of the daytime 'magic-hour' shots were very blue. I therefore made the night scenes much more yellow and orange, simulating the look of real sodium-vapor streetlights."

The remaining third of the film takes place in a basement where a serial killer has sequestered his victim. "The basement had this long corridor with a very low ceilings," Franco recalls. "Yves has a strong preference for wide-angle lenses, so we were using wide-angle lenses in the basement and showing the ceiling to make the space feel much more enclosed. Even though the wide angles may make the room seem bigger, you're seeing all four walls and the ceiling around you, so you really feel the environment. We would even shoot our close-ups with a 24mm or an 18mm, very close to the actors, which can become quite a trick. When you have a dolly move in on an actor, he has to have three or four different eyelines all the way through the move or he'll start to appear as if he's looking away from the lens as the camera moves in. When you set an eyeline with a piece of tape on the inside of the matte box and then move it even a fraction of an inch, it can look as if he's looking four meters away."

Kees Van Oostrum, ASC
Medusa's Child

Born in Holland, cinematographer Kees Van Oostrum, ASC earned his third ASC Award nomination with *Medusa's Child*. His first nomination came in 1992 for the miniseries *Burden of Proof* (see *AC* May 1993); he then won in 1993 for *Return to Lonesome Dove, Part II*, which was also nominated for an Emmy Award (*AC* May/Oct. '94). Van Oostrum received an Emmy in 1990 for the ABC special *The Last Chance*, as well as a nomination in 1992 for *Miss Rose White* (*AC* Oct. '92). His other credits include the miniseries *Son of the Morning Star, Day One* and *An Inconvenient Woman*, the MOWs *Down Came A Blackbird, The Enemy Within, Children of the Dark*, and *The Long Road Home*, as well as the pilots for *Profiler* and *Second Noah*. He has also shot the feature films *Thinner* (*AC* April '96), *Blue Heaven, A Certain Fury, Separate Lives* and *Gettysburg*.

Van Oostrum is also the inventor of the Panther Aerocrane, an ergonomically-balanced telescoping jib arm constructed from aluminum.

Medusa's Child was directed by Larry Shaw and concerns an embittered scientist who sends his ex-wife to deliver a package to the Pentagon. While aboard the cargo plane, the package is discovered to be a nuclear bomb. Since the majority of the film takes place within the tight confines of the aircraft, one of Van Oostrum's primary concerns was to sell the effect of being aboard an actual moving plane flying through bad weather — although the footage was actually shot within the comfortable confines of a soundstage. To create the illusion, the filmmakers built an 80' mockup of the cargo plane interior on a gimbal to create the requisite movement, often utilizing cranes and snorkel lenses to further enhance the photographic approach.

With so much of the material taking place inside the cargo plane, using a greenscreen outside the windows proved unfeasible, so a black Duvateen backdrop was hung outside the set. Rain bars and wind machines helped to create the sense of movement. Additionally, Van Oostrum also had a self-supporting lighting system that helped simulate turbulence during scenes in which the plane was battered by the elements. Against this frenetic backdrop, the story then becomes a race against time as the FBI and the crew aboard the cargo plane try to defuse the bomb.

Movie of the Week or Pilot

William Wages, ASC*
Buffalo Soldiers

Georgia resident William Wages, ASC earned his second consecutive ASC Award this year for *Buffalo Soldiers*. He garnered last year's trophy, as well as a Cable ACE Award, for *Riders of the Purple Sage* (see *AC* May '97). The cinematographer has enjoyed a fortuitous collaboration with director Charles Haid, and *Buffalo Soldiers* is the duo's sixth film together — it is also Wages' sixth ASC Award-nominated work. He earned previous nods in 1988 for *Gore Vidal's Lincoln*, in 1990 for both *Caroline* and *Voices Within: The Story of Truddi Chase, Part II* (*AC* May '91) and then in 1991 for the series *I'll Fly Away* (*AC* May '92). Wages has also photographed such feature films *as Down in the Delta, Love Potion No. 9, In the Army Now* and *Iron Will*.

For *Buffalo Soldiers*, Wages and Haid approached the material in a very different manner than they had on *Riders of the Purple Sage*. The cinematographer notes, "*Riders* was

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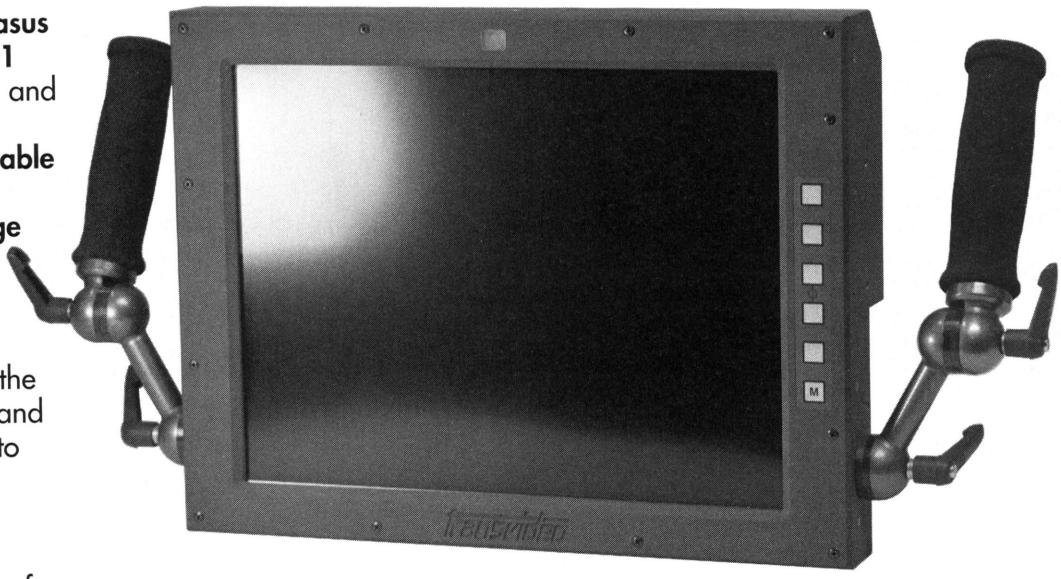

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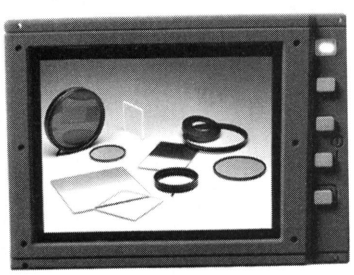

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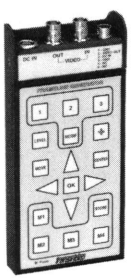

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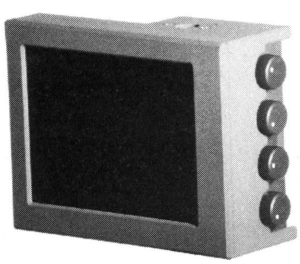

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much more of a classic western, while *Buffalo Soldiers* is the story about how the white establishment of the late 1800s tried to use African-American Civil War veterans of the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry to perform genocide on the Native Americans. It's a brutal and *true* story, so we decided to tell it in a very straightforward way, not glamorizing anything and not holding anything back. Basically, it's just in-your-face [photographically].

"The lighting style was realistic as well, so that it would look real and not lit — which meant that for the most part, it was not a hard-light style. We very seldom live in a hard-light world, and they certainly didn't back then, unless you were outdoors."

In crafting a stark tone for this untold story, Wages was initially concerned with rendering the dark-skinned actors' facial details accurately while they were shadowed under the wide brims of their hats. "Almost any cinematographer will tell you that one of the most difficult things to do is photograph African-Americans in the desert with hats on," he opines. "It's a delicate balance to keep the facial detail and yet not allow things to look 'lit.' A lot of the scenes that are outdoors in the daytime are in fact *extremely* lit. There's a lot of lighting going on that is hopefully invisible.

"During prep, I did an across-the-board, unbiased test of every available Fuji and Kodak film stock, to see which gave me the most shadow detail under these conditions," he explains. "I didn't select my film stock for a specific rendering of a gritty reality, but for the widest latitude. In my tests, I shot a stand-in wearing a hat in the desert with all of the stocks, just changing the magazines for the same exact shot, and I ended up using Fuji's tungsten F-250 8551, which had the most latitude. I love the new Vision stocks and use Kodak all the time, but for this particular film and this particular look, the Fuji 8551 was the way to go. Black people have wonderful tonal ranges in their faces, and this stock captures them."

Despite the Fuji stock's latitude, Wages still paid particular attention his levels of fill lighting while shooting on the production's blazing Arizona locations. "I used a lot of 12' by 12' bounces with muslin and what we called a 'microwave,' which is a sheet of material with silver lamé on one side and white on the other," he details. "I usually had the grips string one of those up, because that way I had the option of using either side. I used the white side most of the time. The white is a bright white, but it has a dull finish — unlike a Griffolyn, which is shiny. Actually, the Griffolyns used to be dull when they first came out, but they've changed the way they make them, so I don't used them very often."

Shelly Johnson
Louisa May Alcott's The Inheritance

Shelly Johnson was previously nominated for an ASC Award in 1989 for *Everybody's Baby: The Rescue of Jessica McClure* (see *AC* May 1990). A graduate of Art Center College of Design (where he studied film with fellow classmate Don Burgess, ASC), Johnson began his career as a gaffer. After advancing to cinematographer, he quickly amassed an extensive list of television credits, including *Stephen King's The Shining, Devil's Pay, Alien Nation: Millennium, Tell Me No Secrets, In the Line of Duty: Kidnapped, Saint Maybe, Quicksilver Highway,* and *Alien Nation: Body and Soul.* Johnson's feature credits include *Maid to Order, Nightflyers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze, Native Son* and *Amanda.*

The Inheritance was the 10th film that Johnson has made with director Bobby Roth. The cinematographer notes, "After 10 films together, Bobby and I have things very much down to a shorthand. He pushes television to such a marvelous extreme — more than I've seen any other director do — and I relish every moment that I can help him do that.

"*The Inheritance* is a period piece set in 1865, and the single element that inspired the look the most was the painting style of Gustav Caillebotte. There happened to be a Caillebotte exhibition right before we were shooting — it was perfect timing, and got us thinking about the kind of visual identity we wanted our movie to have.

"What struck us most about Caillebotte's work was his use of an asymmetrical frame and his principals of composition. I also studied his use of shadow and color. A lot of Caillebotte's work seemed to lean toward color tones; knowing that Bobby has a penchant for warmer tones, I chose to layer my shadows with tones of yellow. So on this particular project we talked very generally about Caillebotte's paintings and the environment we wanted to create. We then went over the script and discussed the emotional impact of each scene and how we could use these textural elements to differentiate mood and the telling of the story."

Since *The Inheritance* was set before the advent of electricity, Johnson relied on naturalistic illumination motivated through the use of daylight and candlelight. "There is an extraordinary amount of candlelight," submits the cinematographer. "While simultaneously telling the story, we felt it was very important to have a sense of the environment in order to have an understanding of the characters. When we first talked about using candlelight, I was initially thrilled and then apprehensive. We decided not to light scenes with actual candles, but to light so that it would *appear* as if candles

were lighting the scene. My feeling was that if I used candles as a source light, I would have had to go with faster film stock than I wanted to use. Looking at the work of Caillebotte, I decided early on to go with Eastman's 200 ASA 5287 stock — which I rated at 160. *[Ed. Note: 5287 was discontinued last year and replaced with low-con 5277 Vision 320T.]* That ruled out using candles as our actual sources. Otherwise, I also felt that we would be forced to place the candles where they'd be needed for exposure purposes, instead of placing them where they worked best for us dramatically.

"I had previously used 87 on a feature and was very impressed with the way it layered the blacks," he adds. "I found that by overexposing slightly and printing it down, the blacks became even, neat, and crisp, which I found very pleasing. I felt that we could work in more shadowed tones and be able to apply color to those areas, which I don't think we could have done with any other film stock while maintaining the blacks."

Jacek Laskus
The Garden of Redemption

Polish-born director of photography Jacek Laskus was drawn to cinematography by an early appreciation of photography and art. After graduating high school, he enrolled in the cinematography program at the famed Polish Film Academy. Part of his curriculum was to spend his summers working as a camera intern, but it was Haskell Wexler, ASC's documentary-flavored drama *Medium Cool* that opened his eyes to a more liberated style of camerawork and inspired him to move to the U.S. After emigrating, he begin working on documentaries, later moved into independent film production in New York, and shot his first feature, *Parting Glances.*

Laskus was later nominated for an ASC Award in 1988 for the

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telefilm *The Cain Mutiny Court Martial,* and received a Cable ACE Award for *Penn & Teller's Invisible Thread.* His other credits include *Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong, One Man Standing, Stepfather II* and *Incident At Dark River.*

The Garden of Redemption was Laskus' second collaboration with director Tom Donnelly (they had previously made the cable move *Blindsided* and have since produced *Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong*). "I think Tom and I found that we complemented each other on the set, and we had a good time doing *Blindsided.* Tom wrote *The Garden of Redemption,* which is a period film set at the end of World War II in Italy. The film is kind of a forbidden love story between a peasant girl and a priest who is hiding from the war behind his robe and the church. The story is about how the two characters change each other's lives in the final days of German occupation of this little town.

"Tom and I looked for locations very early on, and found that we could accomplish what we needed to do in Portugal, using a little town to double for Italy," Laskus reveals. "We had a 23-day schedule, so I tried to create the flavor of Italy while still striving to connect with an American audience. It had to have a certain look that would combine a European aesthetic with American filmmaking polish."

To achieve this goal, Laskus brought in people from all over the world, including Irish operator Des Whelan, Israeli gaffer Gettier Nimrod, and an exceptional electrical crew from Portugal. "We had producers who understood how to maneuver the money so that there would be a lot of value put on the screen," the cinematographer says. "We also had very good actors who did almost everything in two takes. All of that allowed us to rehearse the scene and have time to light, so I didn't have to compromise as much as I normally would have to. About 98 percent of what we shot is on the screen; we were efficient in shooting only what was essential."

In re-creating WWII-era Italy, Laskus first made some artistic decisions on how the film should be shot. "I wanted to be respectful to the time period," he states. "For example, I used Cooke lenses. I felt that using the older glass with certain focal lengths — and not going wider or longer than those focal lengths — would give me the same types of restrictions that had been placed upon actual films from that period. That meant never using a 10mm or a 300mm lens, for example. Of course, I occasionally broke those rules, but I tried to do it as seldom as possible. In certain situations we put a zoom on because it was quicker and easier for exterior work.

"Although *The Garden of Redemption* is a war story, I wanted to create the softness of a love story. Therefore, my lenses were softer and I used filtration that would add some softness. However, the stock I used was primarily EXR 5293, which is contrasty with strong blacks. We also tried to find angles that weren't too modern and used much longer cuts, which gave the film more of a European feeling. So there was a bit of a balance between both modern and classic techniques.

"This concept applied to the lighting as well. I felt that the lighting should be more classical in a way, with the feeling of a 1950s movie. For example, I didn't want to use blue light at night. I felt I should be looking perhaps more towards German expressionistic lighting, so that the look would be a bit more sourcey and dramatic."

Mike Southon, BSC
Snow White: A Tale of Terror

The current president of the British Society of Cinematographers, Mike Southon, BSC earned his first ASC Award nomination with *Snow White: A Tale of Terror.* Asked what drew him to choose filmmaking as a career, he replies, "It just kind of came naturally as I was growing up. I got my first 8mm movie camera when I was 13 or 14 years old, but even before that I was always playing around with projectors and all sorts of optical toys. So it's hard to say where the attraction came from — it just always was there."

After finishing school, Southon broke into the industry by working on educational television programs. He then applied for one of just six camera intern positions at the BBC, and was selected from a pool of over 3,500 other applicants. "At that time, the BBC had a film department with more than 70 film crews," relates Southon. "Anything that was shot outside of their main, dinosaur-like television studios was shot on 16mm film, because there was no kind of affordable tape back then. I was lucky enough to get in there, which meant that I spent a year as a trainee for second AC. As a trainee, you went to every single department in the BBC for a couple of weeks and just worked your way up through the system. I then started going on the road with the crews; after a year, you either made it or you didn't."

After making his mark as a documentary cameraman on projects such as the non-fiction series *Hospital,* Southon soon found his true calling and began shooting narrative films. His feature credits include *Air Bud, Gothic, The Run of the Country, The Final Cut, Little Man Tate, Paperhouse, A Kiss Before Dying* and *Wuthering Heights.* Southon has also shot hundreds of commercials and music videos.

Southon was immediately drawn to *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* because the script presented a much darker rendition of the familiar fairy tale. "The script was about somebody who is driven by an obsession which

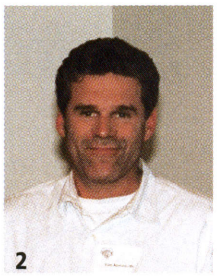
1

Celebrating Excellence

In case you missed the festivities, here's an array of photos taken during the 12th Annual ASC Outstanding Achievement Awards, held on March 8 at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, and during the Nominees Dinner, which took place prior to the ceremony at the ASC Clubhouse in Hollywood.

Contributing Photographers:
Jeff Granberry, Chris Pizzello, Christopher Probst, and David E. Williams

NOMINEES DINNER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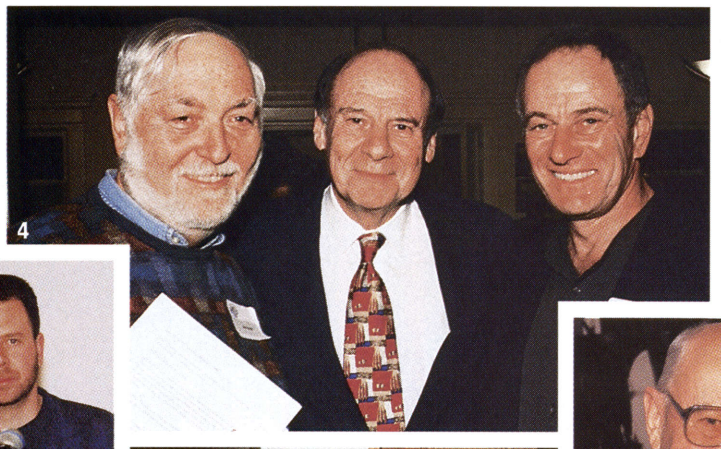
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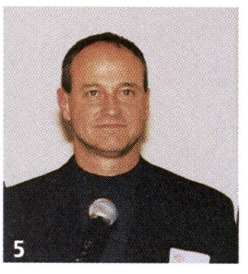
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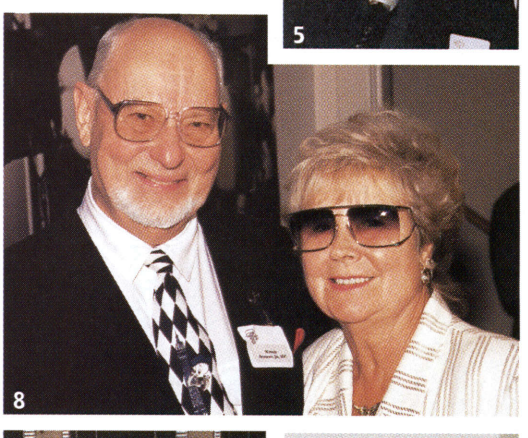
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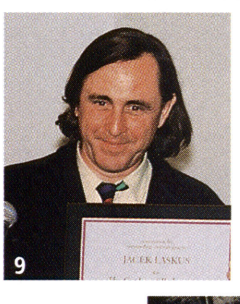
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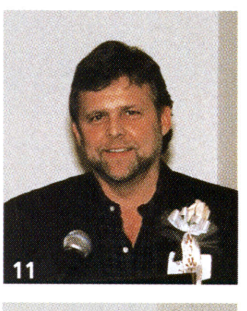
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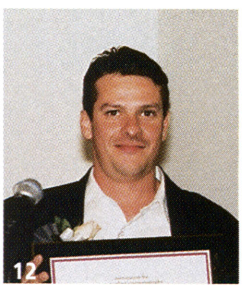
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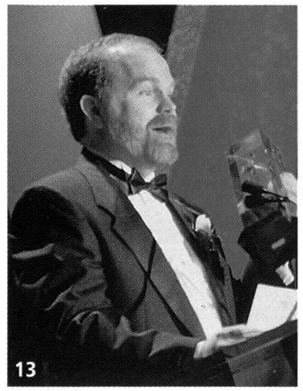
Preceding page: (1) Directors Brian Levant and Arthur Hiller, flanking Lifetime Achievement Award honoree Victor Kemper, ASC onstage during the Awards ceremony. At the Nominees Dinner, this page: (2) nominee James Bagdonas, ASC; (3) Victor Kemper, ASC, Society President Woody Omens, ASC and Florence Omens, International Award honoree Freddie Francis, BSC and Pamela Francis; (4) Bob Fisher, Awards Comittee Chairman Burton Stone and Comittee Co-Chairman Owen Roizman, ASC; (5) Mini-series winner Alan Caso; (6) nominee David Franco, (7) Kodak's president of Motion Imaging, Dick Aschman, and Burton Stone; (8) Howard Anderson Jr., ASC and friend Joanne Reeves; (9) nominee Jacek Laskus; (10) Lois Burwell (guest of John Toll, ASC) and nominee Janusz Kaminski, ASC; (11) nominee Billy Dickson; (12) nominee Bing Sokolsky.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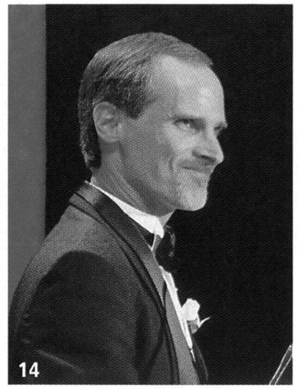
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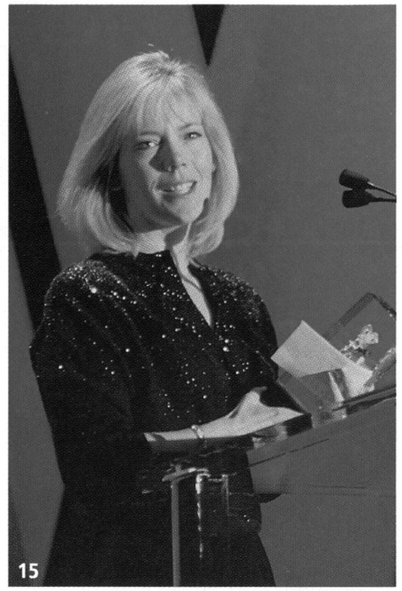
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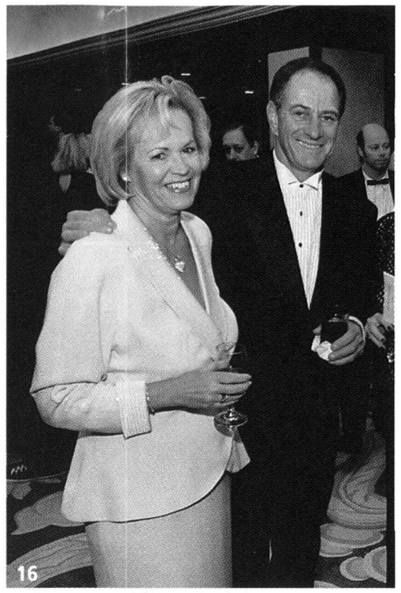
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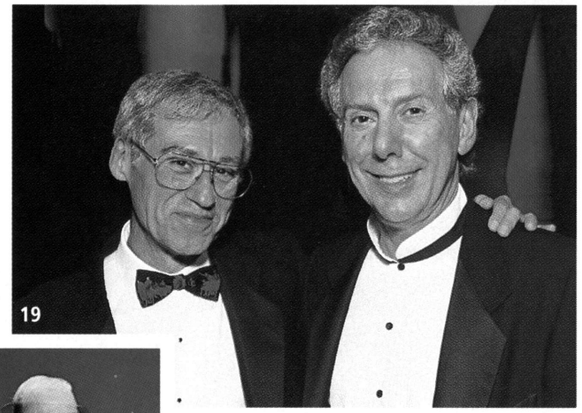
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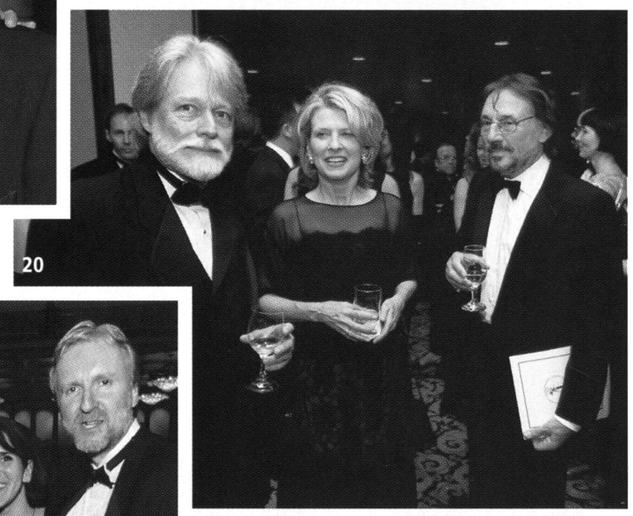
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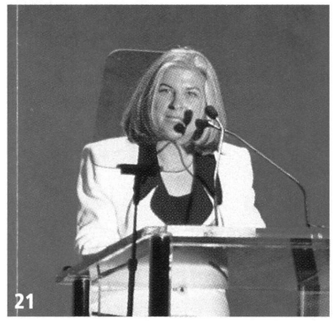
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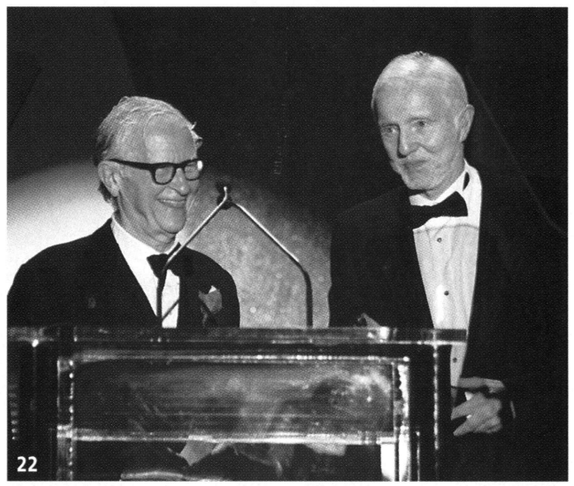
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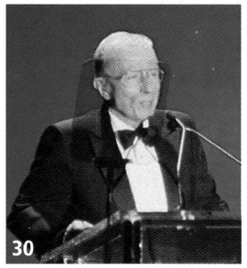
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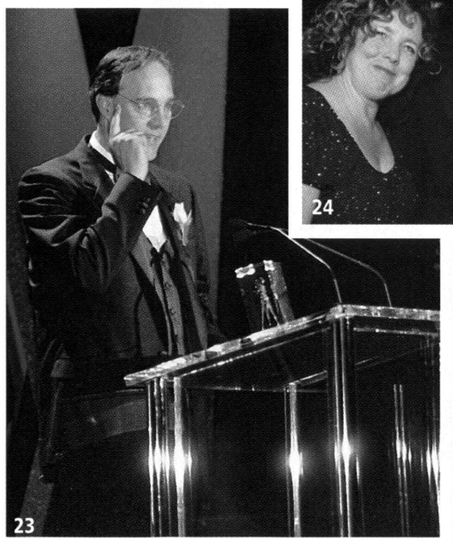
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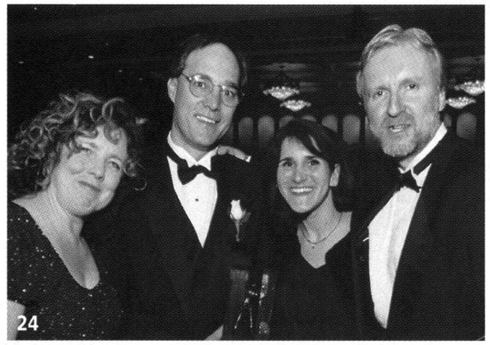
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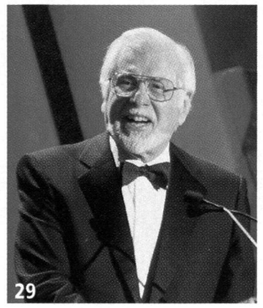
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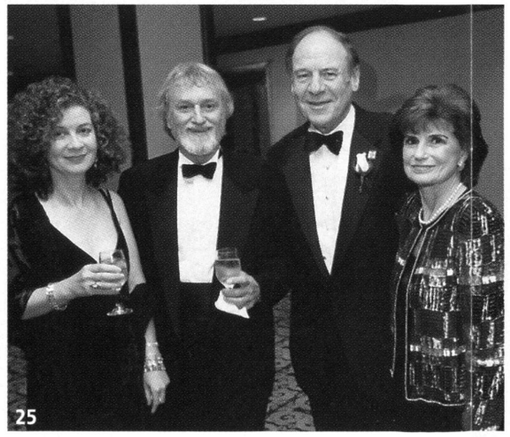
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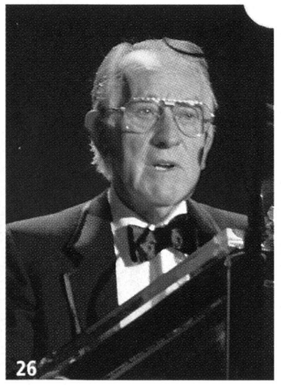
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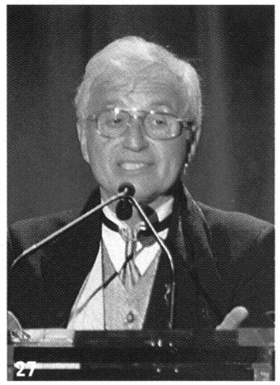
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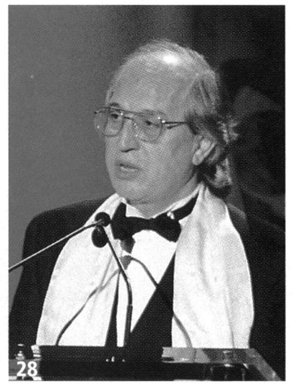
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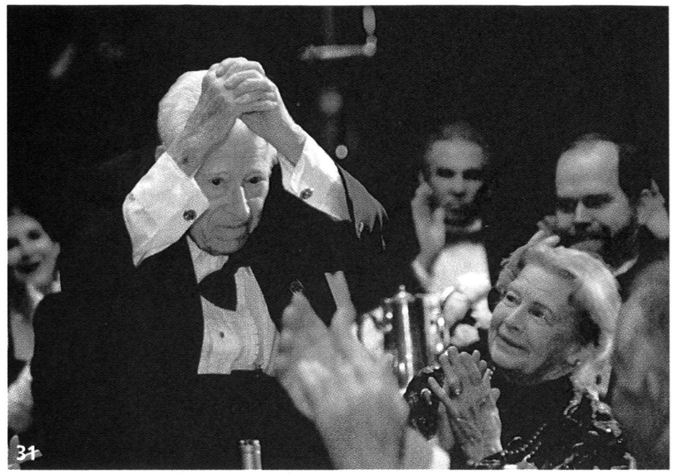
At the Awards ceremony: (13) Movie of the Week winner William Wages, ASC; (14) Regular Series winner Marc Reshovsky; (15) Allyson Caso accepts for her husband, Alan; (16) Mona and Owen Roizman, ASC; (17) Ron Garcia, ASC and wife Peggy King; (18) Board of Governors honoree Francis Ford Coppola; (19) Woody Omens, ASC and Michael Margulies, ASC; (20) Curtis Clark, ASC with Susan and Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC; (21) Television Academy president Meryl Marshall; (22) President's Award honoree Albert Maysles with Haskell Wexler, ASC; (23) Theatrical Release winner Russell Carpenter, ASC; (24) Patti and Russell Carpenter, *Titanic* executive producer Rae Sanchini and director James Cameron; (25) Barbara Marko and Conrad Hall, ASC with Burton and Judy Stone; (26) Freddie Francis, BSC; (27) Victor Kemper, ASC; (28) Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC; (29) Producer's Guild president Leonard Stern; (30) DGA President Jack Shea.

Awards Ceremony

The festivities continue: (31) Lin Dunn, ASC and his wife, Alice; (32) Skip Nicholson and ASC associate member Rob Hummel; (33) director Robert Mulligan, Pamela and Freddie Francis, BSC and Sandy Mulligan; (34) ASC fellows John Toll and Allen Daviau; (35) Charlene and Dean Cundey, ASC; (36) Victor Kemper, ASC, Jay and Arianné Cipes, and Claire Kemper; (37) Caleb Deschanel, ASC and his wife, Mary Jo; (38) Jessica Sitoner and Gerald Perry Finnerman, ASC; (39) Robert Primes, ASC and his wife, Theo, with Gary Demos; (40) Florence and Woody Omens, ASC, Karen Kasaba and nominee Shelly Johnson; (41) Jon Elsenbach, ASC and guest with Janet and Harry Stradling Jr., ASC; (42) Rebekah and Sara Maysles, Steven Poster, ASC, Sandy Corbet and Albert Maysles; (43) Steve Meizler, David Devlin, Marek Bojsza, Janusz Kaminski, ASC, Jim Kwiatkowski and Mark Spath.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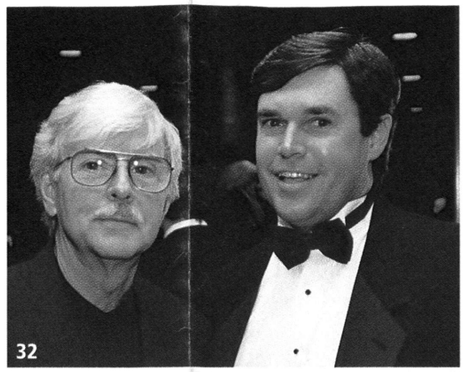
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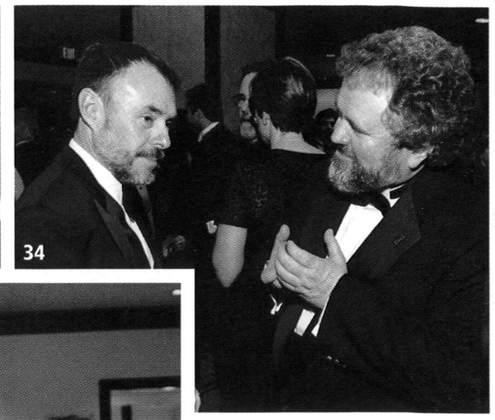
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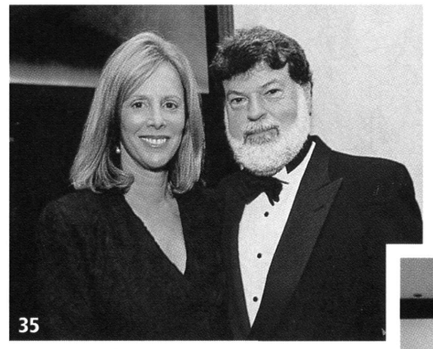
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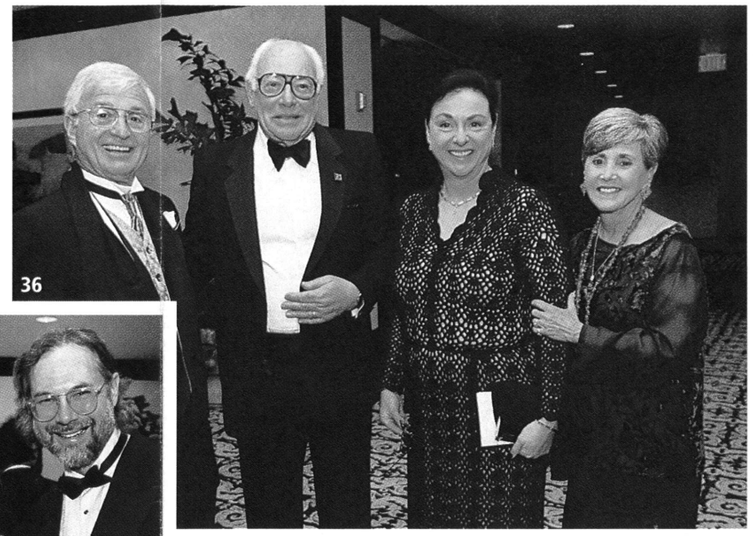
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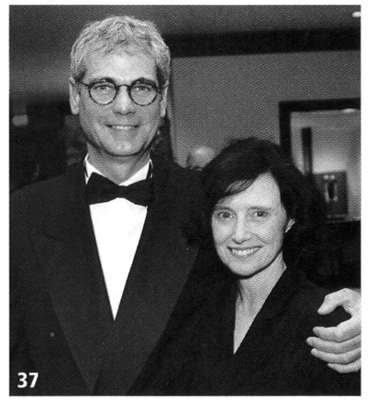
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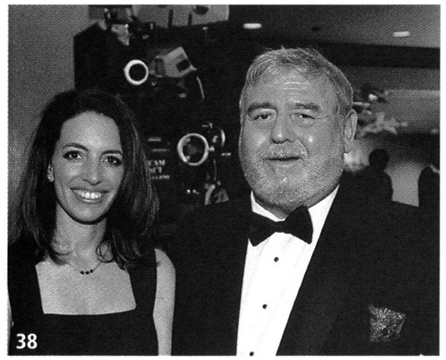
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leads her to do the most awful things," he notes. "In this case, the obsessive person is the stepmother, played by Sigourney Weaver. She notices Snow White's beauty and the influence she has on people — which begins to threaten the notion of *her own* beauty. Jealousy then begins to rot away her morality.

"The story is told in a Gothic, fairy tale context, so it became fairly obvious where I would go with it visually. I had many discussions about the look with production designer Gemma Jackson. I'm a great believer in having a very close relationship with the production designer. If you don't get that right, then you can't visually connect on a movie. Gemma quite was interested in a medieval look, with pale faces on the women, rugged faces on the men, and costumes that reflected European paintings from the story's general period, which we felt was between 1700 and 1800.

"The other two things that fascinated me about the structure of the script was that the movie starts off in an icy environment — Snow White is actually born in the snow — but then in the end, the stepmother is destroyed by fire. In a sense, the fire consumes her in the same way that her obsession has consumed her. Therefore, I knew that I had two temperatures to work with: this frozen quality at one end, with the extraordinary notion of birth in that cold climate, and this death-by-fire at the end. I tried to echo that duality in the film via the colors. Even in the warmest room, I wanted to have icy fingers creeping up the window panes, so that viewers would always be aware of the presence of both temperatures.

"I tried to be very true to light sources," he continues, "so I used a lot of candles and torchlight. Also, much of the picture was shot on some wonderful sets that Gemma created, which had some pretty dramatic painted backdrops that we

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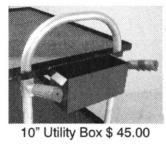
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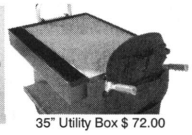
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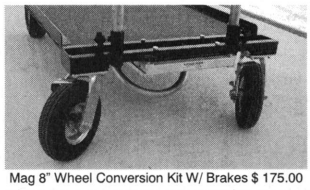
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could show outside windows. I asked her not to make the backdrops specifically sunny or overcast, so that I could enhance them with lighting rather than just flat-lighting them. That way, I could put a lot more light on the sky areas and control the density on the ground areas, which allowed us to get a lot of very different looks outside and emotionally echo what was going on in the scenes. Of course, when things get bad in the story, the skies darken and storms gather, and it's a bit easier to create that if you have a reasonably blank canvas with which to work."

Bing Sokolsky
Oliver Twist

Bing Sokolsky earned his fourth ASC Award nomination for his work on director Tony Bill's adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic *Oliver Twist.* He earned two 1993 ASC Award nominations for his depiction of tough New York cops on the *N.Y.P.D. Blue* pilot, as well as the episode "True Confessions" (see *AC* May '94). He was also nominated last year for his efforts on *High Incident* (*AC* May '97). Sokolsky's other credits include the pilots for *Three, Me and Nick* and *Beauty;* the MOWs *Doing Time On Maple Drive* and *The Tower;* and the HBO feature *Black Cat Run.* Sokolsky has also done second-unit camerawork on *Star Trek: First Contact, Strange Days* and *A Low Down Dirty Shame,* each of which was principally photographed by Matthew Leonetti, ASC.

After being telephoned on a Thursday by *Oliver Twist*'s producer, who asked him to board on a plane to Ireland the next morning, Sokolsky arrived that Saturday to take over shooting of the film, which was then five days into production. He immediately met with the project's various department heads, looked at what had been shot, and then worked for 15 days straight — without having even read the script. "I just jumped into it," relates Sokolsky, who had worked with director Bill on two episodes on *High Incident.* "Most of us know the Dickens story, and there have been a few other remakes. David Lean's black-and-white version [1948, shot by Guy Green, BSC] is really the blueprint, but I wanted to do something different. While we were shooting, I told Tony, 'I've done color, I've done black-and-white, but no one has done a sepiatone look, especially on television.' He loved the idea, so we desaturated the entire picture and then gave it sort of a chocolate wash. I met my colorist, J.R. Benson of 4MC, on this project, and have since used him exclusively because I think he's one of the best. He brought a lot to the plate in creating the look of the show. When I told him what I wanted to do, his eyes lit up and he basically gave up his vacation to do the film."

Prior to Sokolsky's participation in the project, it had been decided to shoot *Oliver Twist* in Super 16, which didn't altogether thrill the cinematographer. "I'm not that fond of Super 16 because of the lens selection," he says. "When you're dealing with 16mm, the format is a 2:1 ratio to 35mm in terms of focal lengths. For example, if you were shooting an actress with a 100mm lens in 35mm, you'd have to use a 50mm lens in 16mm, which isn't the sweetest lens to use. On close-ups, you normally want to elongate the faces by using the longest lens possible. When you start using wide lenses, you begin distorting the face and doing the exact opposite. In 16mm, the main three lenses you're using, especially in a practical location where you can't pull walls, are a 12mm, 16mm and 25mm. That's just a disaster, because the 12mm still distorts like a 12mm, and it made things very difficult.

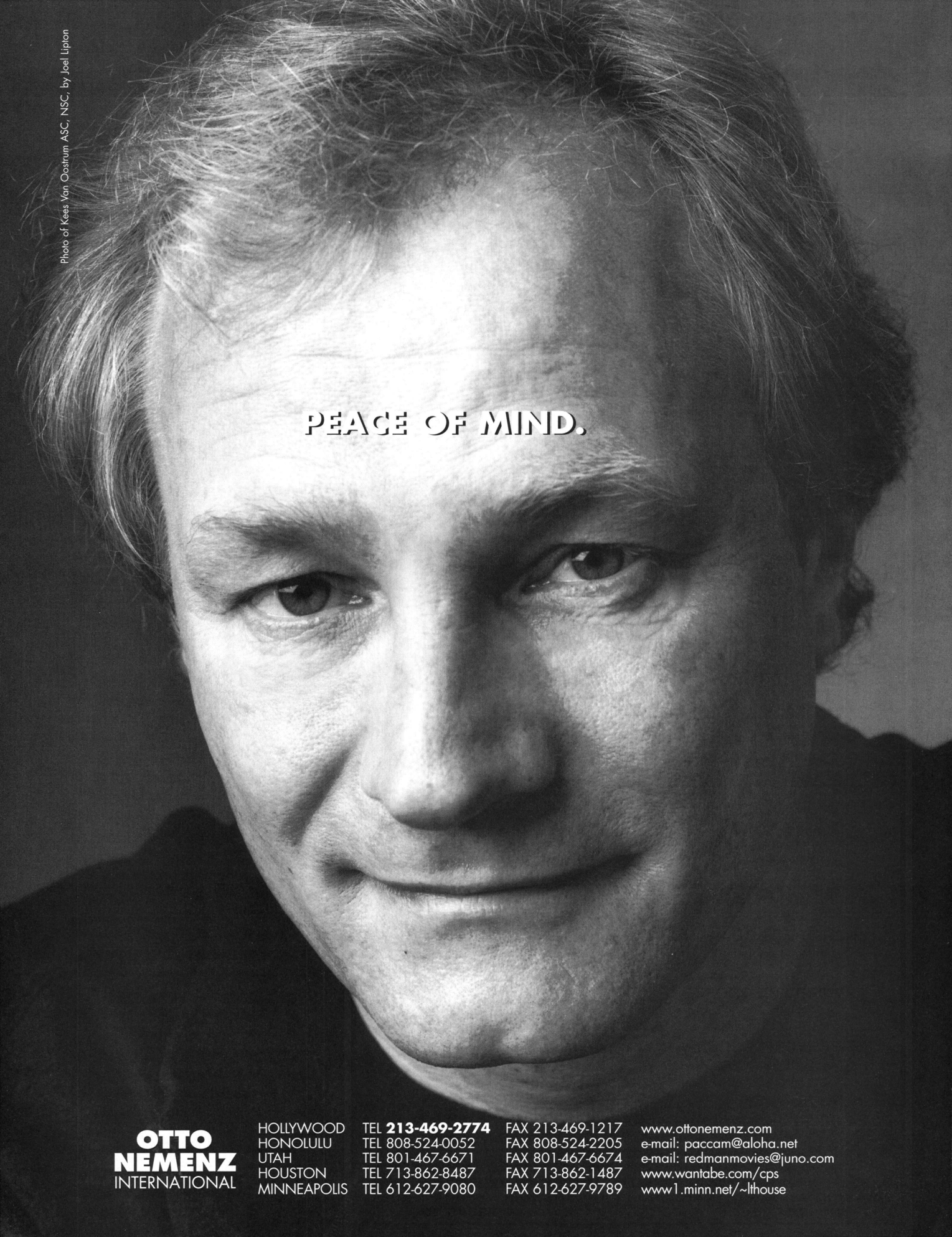
On the positive side, he notes, "I've traveled all over the world, and Ireland is one the most beautiful countries I've ever been to. In particular, the light is unbelievable. You can't point the camera in a wrong direction. I knew as soon as I got there what I wanted to do in terms of the look. I was inspired by the paintings of Vermeer and Georges de La Tour, using hard light with lots of dark blacks and sourcey highlights. The one thing about shooting in Ireland is that even if you're at high noon, it looks as if it's eight or nine in the morning. The light was always pretty low, so we basically had backlight 90 to 95 percent of the day. That was a major factor in terms of the exteriors, because on a tight television schedule you have to keep shooting no matter what time of day it is."

Episode of a Regular Series

Marc Reshovsky *
3rd Rock from the Sun,
"Nightmare on Dick Street"

The "Nightmare on Dick Street" episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun* was Marc Resho66vsky's first foray into the realm of prime-time episodic television, and resulted in his first ASC Award nomination and win. The Los Angeles-raised cinematographer broke into the industry in the early 1980s while shooting documentaries. He later established a niche for himself in the music video arena, amassing a resumé that includes several hundred videos, as well as a score of live concerts. It was in this capacity that he met director Phil Joanou (who later helmed *Rattle and Hum* and *Heaven's Prisoners*), with whom he would later collaborate with on "Nightmare on Dick Street." (The duo recently collaborated once again on a music video for the band U2, detailed on page 80 of this issue.)

As most know, the *3rd Rock* series stars John Lithgow and chronicles the lives of four oddball aliens in human guise who grow to enjoy life on Earth — with hilarious results.



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The producers of the show wanted to end the season by pulling out all the stops and taking the show to a different level with the "Dick Street" installment. "This episode was expanded from the normal half-hour to a full hour," explains Reshovsky. "The premise was that for the first time, each of the characters starts to dream as a human. None of them have ever dreamed before, and they think they're having bizarre visions or hallucinations.

"Phil and I were brought in to do the four dreams," he continues. "We were given carte blanche to go any place we wanted to dramatically, visually and in storytelling style. And we *did* go as far as we could. It was some pretty bizarre stuff for prime-time network television! It was a lot of fun, because stylistically we got to create these four completely different styles. The result became this great hybrid of narrative storytelling and the gonzo approach of music videos, where you can do anything you want, but with the kind of care and high-end effects that you'd use on commercials. It was a wonderful combination of the best of all three worlds."

In devising the four different dreams, Joanou and Reshovsky wanted to harness the personalities of each character and create the most dynamic and outrageous dreams possible. "Phil took the attributes of each character and then designed, from scratch, the formats and stories that would happen in these dreams," the cinematographer says. "Then the writers came in to fill in the dialogue and made sure it was consistent with the characters. Being a cinephile, Phil took certain movie references and made them our point of departure in creating the dreams. John Lithgow's dream, for example, is a kind of *Brazil*-esque nightmare where he's caught in this stark futuristic world with a forced-perspective roof that goes up forever. A cage falls around him and he's then transported into this other room, where [co-star] Jane Curtin appears in a dominatrix outfit and proceeds to torture him while singing "Falling in Love Again" in the style of Marlene Dietrich. It's very absurd.

"I lit this dream to a very high-contrast, with generally cool tones and not too much saturation," Reshovsky continues. "At times I used pretty high overexposure and combined areas of very low-key lighting with very high-key scenes — the sequence was very strong visually in terms of the contrast ranges. We also used a skip-bleach print for the telecine transfer to help increase the contrast and mute the colors.

"Sally — an alien man trapped in a human woman's body — has a dream that's a black-and-white homage to *La Dolce Vita*, in Italian with subtitles and the actual *La Dolce Vita* soundtrack. We shot it in a languid, classical black-and-white style. Her dream wasn't lit with hard light, but in a [soft yet crisp] Richard Avedon style.

"We'd talked about shooting with black-and-white stock, but there were a few elements that we needed to do with greenscreen. We wanted the black-and-white tones to be consistent, so rather than intercut color negative with black-and-white negative, we shot the segment in color and made a print. We then took the color out at the transfer stage.

"The character of Tommy is an alien trapped in a teenage boy's body," he continues. "He naturally has anxieties about school, so we had all kinds of references from *South Pacific* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. Tommy's dream was shot in a more straightforward fashion and then transferred from the negative.

"Finally, there was Harry's dream. His character is a happy-go-lucky goofball. He's not worried about anything, so his dream was a musical number in which he sings "Life's Been Good to Me So Far." Within this sequence, we did a two-minute crane shot like you'd see in a Vincent Minnelli musical, with 30 dancers and a 100' set and no cuts. We later created a sort of Technicolor look [in the transfer].

Added to Reshovsky and Joanou's visual feast was the network's idea to utilize 3-D imagery as a selling point. "We didn't let the 3-D aspect of the show overwhelm our visual approach," Reshovsky maintains. "We realized that most people in the audience weren't going to wear the special glasses, so we tried to make something that would be exciting visually and fun to watch, whether you were watching it in 3-D or not. However, we tried to design shots, when appropriate, that brought out the 3-D.

"The system we used didn't require any physical camera attachments or special lenses, but was dependent on staging and lens choices. Viewers were supposed to wear glasses that had an ND filter on one lens and a clear filter on the other. In effect, the brain perceives one image to be lagging slightly, which creates a sense of 3-D depth. But the effect only works while the camera is tracking in one direction. When you move from right to left it works, but it doesn't when you go left to right. The wider the lenses you use, the more accentuated the 3-D becomes, because it brings out the perspective that's already there. If you watch the episode closely, there are tons of right to left dollies, no left dollies, and lots of clockwise circular moves, which is again right to left. Those were the shots that were designed to bring the out 3-D effect."

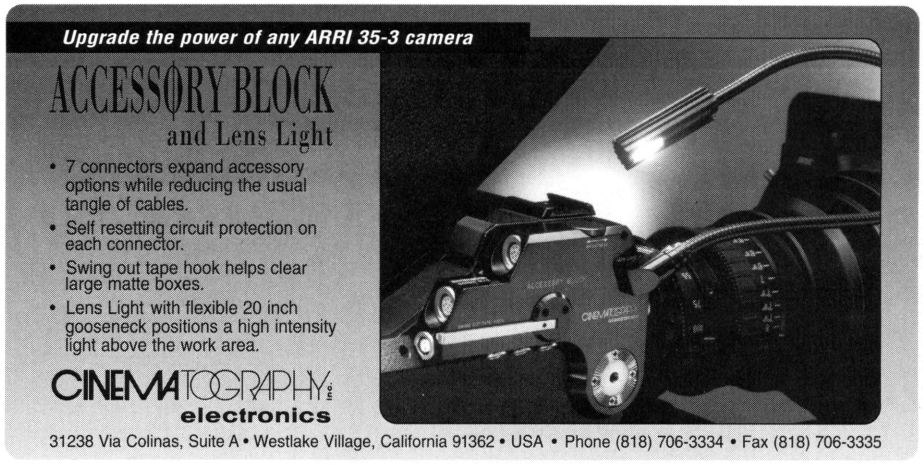
James Bagdonas, ASC
Chicago Hope, "Hope Against Hope"

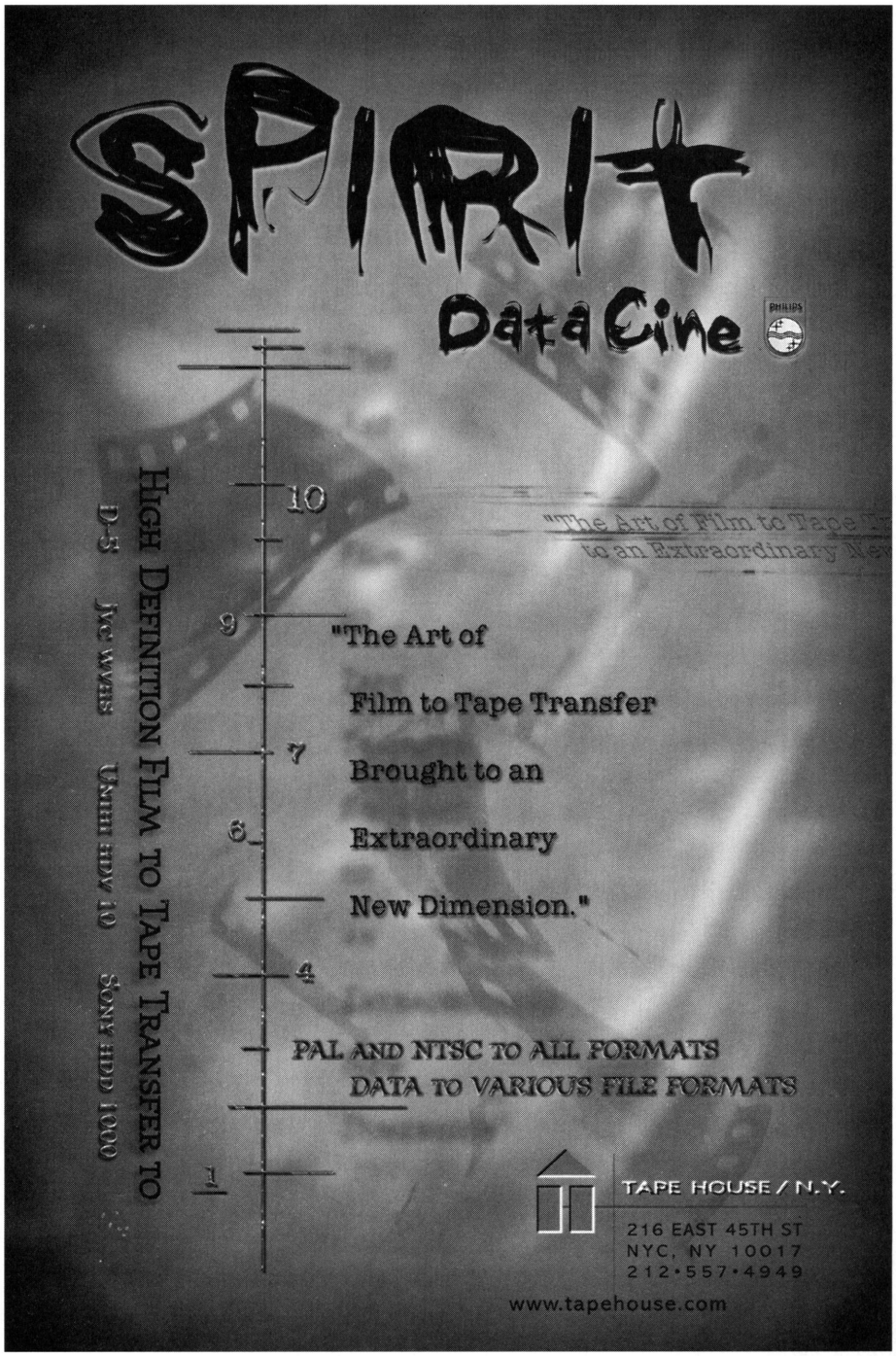
James Bagdonas, ASC has earned two ASC Award nominations for his efforts on the medical drama *Chicago Hope:* he was nominated in 1997 for the episode "Time to Kill" (see *AC*

May/Oct. '97) and this year for "Hope Against Hope." Last year, Bagdonas also achieved the rare feat of a double Emmy nomination for "Time to Kill" and the MOW *Hidden in America* (*AC* Oct. '97). Additionally, Bagdonas earned an ASC Award nomination in 1989 for an episode of *Hunter* titled "Investment in Death" (*AC* May '90). He had served as that show's camera operator before being promoted to cinematographer.

After two seasons on *Hunter*, Bagdonas started shooting commercials, as well as the MOW *Conagher* and the feature *American Heart*, before returning to episodic television on *Lois and Clark: The Adventures of Superman*. He remained with *Lois and Clark* for three seasons until he was offered *Chicago Hope*. "This season is already quite a bit different than last year," says Bagdonas of his tour with the critically-lauded medical series. "We're taking the photography of the hospital a bit further by taking some dramatic license in creating day, night or evening looks and not worrying about matching the way one hallway will look from one episode to another. The producers give us the freedom to light scenes based on the truth of the moment [in the story] — whatever works for that particular episode. So I think the thrust is of the show is opening up."

When Bagdonas joined the *Chicago Hope* team, he learned that the series had been rendered on Kodak's 5600 PrimeTime 640T telecine stock by director of photography Kenneth Zunder, ASC. After some initial tests, Bagdonas discovered the stock's versatility and incredible speed, and continued using the emulsion. He later switched to Kodak's improved 640T -- now numbered 5620 -- and reports that he is extremely satisfied with the results. "The new stock is absolutely head and shoulders above the original PrimeTime," says the cinematographer. "With the original





PrimeTime, I always had to make some compromises in terms of contrast and sharpness. The new PrimeTime has much more contrast built into it. The highlights stay white when overexposed -- like when you blow out a window -- and don't go magenta. It basically looks like the Vision negative stocks."

Bagdonas explains that he had a difficult time selecting a single episode to represent his body work done on the series: "It was really tough, because we did a musical episode, one in black-and-white, and one that we shot entirely on location in Las Vegas. I picked 'Hope Against Hope' because it was the year-end finalé and I didn't necessarily have to match to or keep a particular continuity with any other episodes. There were also quite a few nighttime scenes in that episode, which created more lighting challenges and obstacles to overcome."

Featured in this installment of the series is a dramatic helicopter crash on the high-rise terrace of the hospital. "That was quite a challenge in itself," he expands. "We brought in a full-sized helicopter on our terrace set and shot it against our nighttime city backing. We had rain and lightning going as we crashed the helicopter while still staying within the confines of the space we had. We just tried to get as wide as we could without seeing past the backing or revealing the rain-bars."

Billy Dickson
Ally McBeal, "Silver Bells"

Cinematographer Billy Dickson earned his first ASC Award nomination with the "Silver Bells" episode of the popular comedy series *Ally McBeal*. Dickson started out in the industry as a loader and worked his way up through the ranks as a second AC, first AC and camera operator before becoming a director of photography in 1983. His first foray into television was the two-hour MOW Western *Desperado IV: Badlands Justice*. Dickson soon found himself shooting upwards of eight MOWs a year, compiling a list of credits that includes *Frequent Flyer*, *A Promise to Carolyn*, *Fast Company*, *As Good As Dead*, *Labor of Love*, *Night Owl*, *Vestige of Honor*, and *Blind Need*, as well as the pilots for *Babylon 5* and *Ally McBeal*. He has also shot 10 episodes of the series *The Big Easy*, 13 episodes of *Deadly Games*, and the feature films *Halloween VI* and *Edge of Honor*.

Dickson was offered the pilot for *Ally McBeal* by director Jim Frawley, with whom he had worked on *The Big Easy* and the MOW *Blind Need*. "For *Ally McBeal*, we both wanted a lot of natural light because there are a lot of windows in the show's legal office sets," he notes. "We play things in very tight close-ups and use long lenses to throw the backgrounds out of focus as much as possible, because most of the information is about the actors' expressions and what they're saying."

While photographing a series week after week on the same sets, cinematographers often run the risk of becoming bored. "That was my biggest worry," Dickson confesses. "I had done so many TV movies that every four weeks I was used to doing a new project. When I took *Ally McBeal*, I knew that I was going to be on the same sets at least 100 times, so I always try to find new and fun ways to shoot things. I find different angles, mix up the lighting a bit and generally challenge myself in different situations. I love to try out new lighting fixtures, and I've gone through a whole slew of styles on the show in terms of diffusion materials and ways to key the actors from different directions to see how it affects their look. There's a definite temptation to stick with a particular lighting style for a character, because there is a schedule: I know that certain techniques work, and I know I can get those shots done in X amount of time when we're under the gun. I sometimes fall into that type of daily routine, but I also get into situations where I can tweak things or add something new.

"I often try to introduce as much 'unnatural' natural sunlight as I can," he adds. "I also try to place the actors into positions where it favors them visually and photographically. I put hot spots in places where the real sun would be if it came through a skylight, and that's where we'll place the action. I think that type of technique helps create the illusion for the audience that maybe the scene isn't taking place on a set, and that there really is some sunlight coming in."

Dickson photographs *Ally McBeal* on Fuji's tungsten-balanced F-500 8571 and uses very little diffusion on the lens, favoring a clean, crisp look while allowing the stock's smooth quality to soften the image. The cinematographer explains, "When we were discussing the show, Jim and I had just shot a MOW on Fuji and we talked about the look and the softness of it, as well as the color aspects. We definitely wanted the series to be a little more colorful, with warm tones, so we felt that the Fuji stock was the right choice."

Robert McLachlan, CSC
Millennium, "Thin White Line"

Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Robert McLachlan, CSC reminisces, "My father had brought us up with the philosophy that it didn't matter what you did when you grew up — all that counted was that you enjoyed it. What I enjoyed doing as a kid was shooting photographs and making little films, so I thought, 'How can I make a living doing this?'"

While studying film at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Simon Frasier University, McLachlan funded his education by working at a local department store. "There was a grocery department where they used

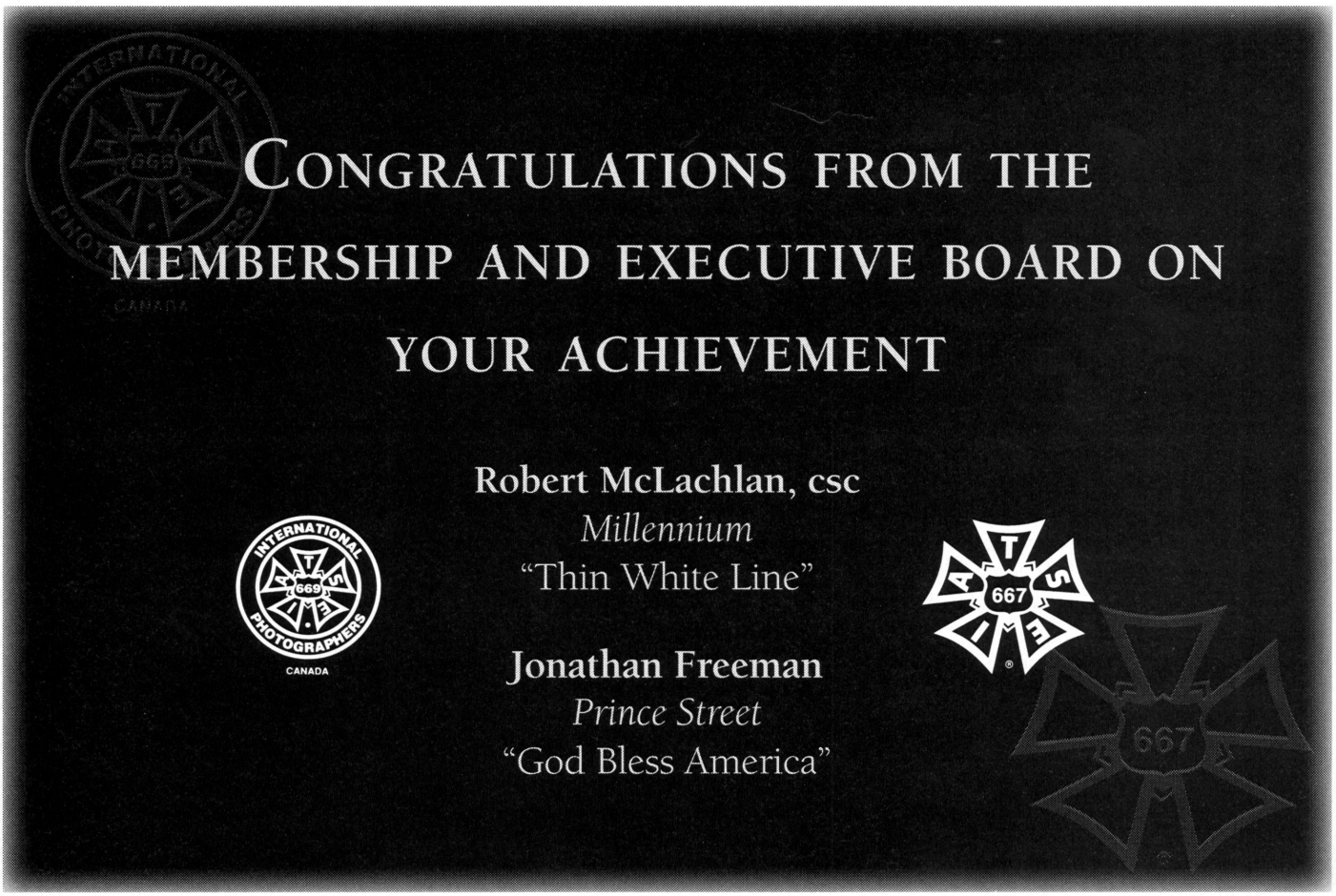
to make their peanut butter," recounts McLachlan. "It was a 100-year-old machine that they were going to get rid of, so I wrote a letter to the president of the company saying that if they gave me $1,000 I'd make a film about it. They gave me the money, I made my film, and it won first prize in the B.C. Student Film Festival in 1978. A vice president liked the film so much that he told me that he had a couple of other films he wanted to make, and asked me what I charged! I quoted him the going industrial film rate, which was about a $1,000 a minute, and started a company called Omnifilm, which is still one of the busiest and most successful companies in Vancouver. Together with my producer/partner Michael Checkick, I spent the next 10 years producing, directing, editing and shooting commercials, industrial films and documentaries."

McLachlan later joined IATSE as a camera operator and landed a job on the series *Seahunt*, which he soon found himself shooting. Since then, the first-time ASC Award nominee has photographed more than 250 episodes of various shows, including *Strange Luck*, *The Commish*, *The Odyssey*, *MacGuyver*, and now two seasons of episodes for the brooding *Millennium*. His telefilm credits include *Murder at the Door*, *Abduction of Innocence*, *Other Women's Children* and *My Name is Kate*, as well as the features *Impolite* and *Abducted*.

In addition to his ASC Award nomination, McLachlan recently earned a CSC Award for his work on *Millennium*.

The cinematographer was hired by producer Chris Carter to shoot the *Millennium* series while the pilot was still being photographed by Peter Wunstorf, CSC (see *AC* Oct. 1987). "The pilot was a great template," states McLachlan, "but pilots are one thing and a series is another. They had 18 days to shoot the pilot, while we are given eight days and maybe some second-unit time. I think that's where my documentary and episodic experience pays off. Of course, it helps to have a terrific crew, and a lot of my guys have been with me for years. They're a big reason why I like getting up and going to work in the morning.

"In terms of the other differences between the show and the pilot, I found that after first couple of episodes, the images were getting kind of mushy due to the heavy amount of color desaturation that we were doing in post at Encore Video. We were essentially creating monochromatic images, and if you're going to do that, you need to light the way you would for black-and-white. That wasn't always the case, but it was *often* the case. It was



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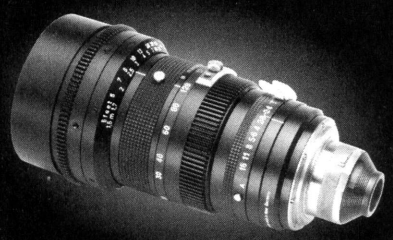

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particularly the case with 'Thin White Line,' the nominated episode. What that means is that you're working much more with hard light and building up texture and density with light and shadow, rather than with color and tone.

"The art direction was superior on that particular episode," McLachlan adds. "I've never kept anything so dark. Nothing was above key. The brightest source was a flashlight, which maybe once or twice was above key, which I think was at a stop of T2.8. I was working exclusively with a spot meter — the way you would with black-and-white photography — and creating the depth and tones strictly with the density of the reflectance values of all of the layers. We were using lots of Fresnels, and outside the windows we were running 4K HMIs for moonlight, which gave us a very hard, intense light. We were using those to pick up a bit of the atmosphere from the fogger machine, and to catch the raindrops coming down."

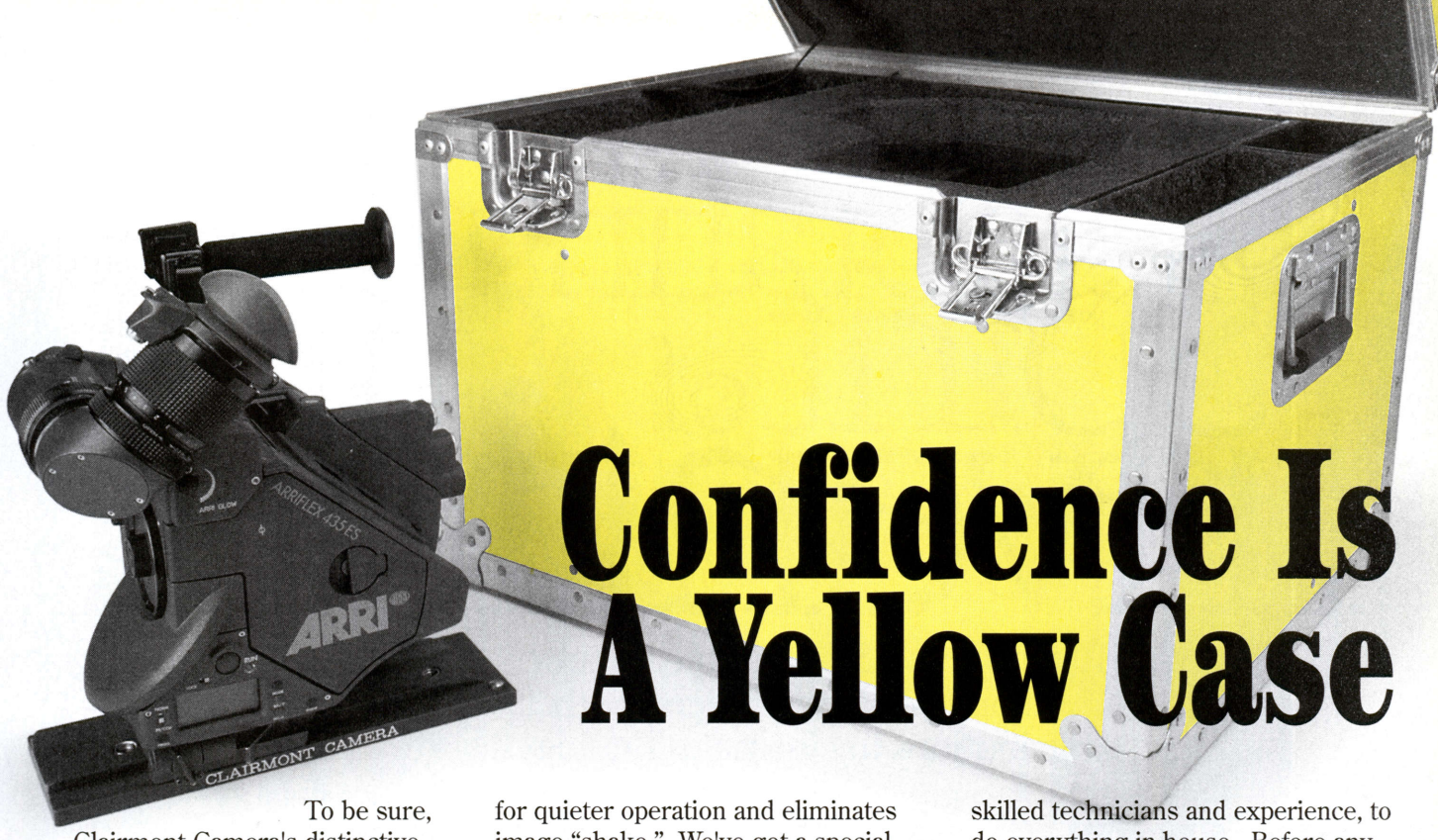
McLachlan notes that the best-looking episodes of *Millennium* have all been helmed by directors with strong visions. He adds, "In the case of 'Thin White Line' it was Tom Wright, who's now doing just about every other episode. Tom started out by doing storyboards for Alfred Hitchcock; he understands preparation, and has a great eye. This episode was also significant in that we did more setups than we had ever done before over a single day. On one 13 ½-hour day we did 80 setups, which ain't too bad!"

Jonathan Freeman
Prince Street, "God Bless America"

Toronto-based cinematographer Jonathan Freeman earned his first ASC Award nomination with the series *Prince Street*, which was also nominated for a 1998 CSC Award. Freeman's other television credits include the series *Three*, *The Spoken Art* and *Quand le Coeur attend*, as well as the MOWs *Promise the Moon* (nominated for a 1997 CSC Award) and *The Planet of Junior Brown*. His features credits are *Carver's Gate*, *Replikator*, *Deadly Wake* and *The Cusp*. Freeman is currently shooting the pilot *Future Sport* for director Ernest Dickerson, ASC.

"I was hired onto *Prince Street* by the show's producers, Brooke Kennedy and Robert Nathan," Freeman explains. "They had created the pilot earlier that year; it was directed by Roger Spottiswoode and shot extremely well by Robert Elswit, BSC [who recently collaborated with each other on the latest James Bond feature, *Tomorrow Never Dies*]. The show's concept involves New York undercover cops and how the volatile situations they get themselves into can affect their lives and their families. So there's a lot of tension, and a feeling that they are always under surveillance. [In the pilot] the filmmakers used a lot of long lenses along multiple axes to give the impression that the characters were being observed from various positions throughout each scene. Francis Ford Coppola [and Bill Butler, ASC] incorporated that sense of tension in *The Conversation*, which we used as an inspiration for *Prince Street*. But in the pilot, they added to that a sense kinetic energy, which involved blocking the performances to move with the camera, while constantly obstructing the frame for a second or two with foreground elements, or certain actors blocking the camera's view of the other actors."

Freeman modeled his lighting for the series on Elswit's treatment in the pilot, which closely matched his own style. "The look included using a lot of practicals and key sources, as well as fluorescents," says the cinematographer. "We created pools of toplight in pools and areas which combined hot sources and shadows. We used the idea of visual obstruction and frustration in the lighting as well, not always allowing viewers to see what they want to see." ■



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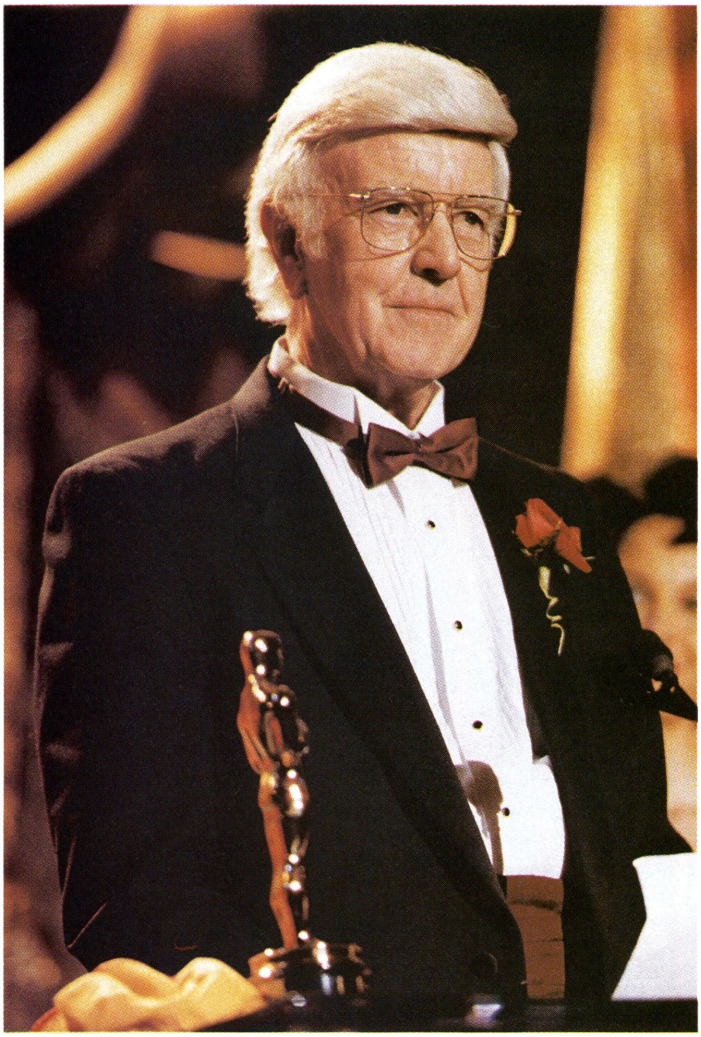
Celebrating the Spirit of Invention

AMPAS honors ASC associate member Don Iwerks and others for their contributions to cinema technology.

by Jay Holben

The Gordon E. Sawyer Oscar statuette is awarded to an individual whose lifetime of technological contributions have served to advance the art of motion picture production. During an elegant ceremony held on February 28, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences bestowed this honor upon cinematographic pioneer Don Iwerks. The 12 previous recipients of this award include Joseph B. Walker, ASC; John O. Aalberg, Dr. John G. Frayne, Linwood G. Dunn, ASC; ASC associate member Fred Hynes, Gordon Henry Cook, Pierre Angenieux, Stefan Kudelski, Ray Harryhausen, Erich Kaestner, Petro Vlahos, and ASC associate Donald C. Rogers.



Iwerks takes the podium at the Sci-Tech Awards ceremony.

Photo courtesy of AMPAS.

Don Iwerks began his career in 1946, working as an apprentice machinist at the Richardson Camera Company in Hollywood while on summer vacation from high school. He returned to the company after graduation and worked as an optical printer operator before being hired by Walt Disney Productions. While there, Iwerks ran developers, optical printers and dye-transfer printers in their process lab. His career at Disney was interrupted in 1951, however, when he was called into service by the U.S. Army. He served for 18 months as a still photographer in the 7796 Signal Photo Corps in Frankfurt, Germany, where fate would change the course of his life.

During his tenure in the service, Iwerks developed Metol poisoning, a dermatological reaction to the chemical methylated p-aminophenol (known commercially as Metol or Kodak Elon Developing Agent) found in many photographic developers. Upon his discharge in

1953, Iwerks attempted to return to the processing lab at Disney, but his condition was a constant hindrance; he could only cure his ailment by removing himself completely from any contact with the chemical.

This led to Iwerks' transfer to the Disney machine shop and camera maintenance department. Here, among other projects, he was involved with the development of the underwater housing for the Mitchell cameras used on *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.* In 1955, Iwerks worked with his father, Ub Iwerks, ASC and Roger Broggie on the 16mm Circarama camera system, which consisted of 11 Eastman CineSpecial cameras mounted on a circular base plate and arranged horizontally to photograph a 360-degree view.

Three years later, Iwerks was given what he deems one of his most enjoyable tasks: the management of the 16mm camera department which supplied equipment to the Disney True Life Adventures naturalist cameramen. "There were always new things that the naturalist cameramen wanted to do," comments Iwerks, "whether it was shooting through a microscope, underwater, or experimenting with extreme telephoto lenses. These things are pretty commonplace today, but in the late 1950s we were doing a lot of invention along the way to help them do their work."

In 1960, the Circarama system was completely redesigned for use on a Fiat Motor Company film which was photographed throughout Italy. In place of the CineSpecials, the system incorporated nine Arriflex cameras (with larger-capacity magazines), which were mounted vertically and pointed into an array of front-surfaced mirrors mounted at a 45-degree angle. This assemblage was a considerably more compact unit than its predecessor. Iwerks accompanied the Circarama system throughout Italy and to the Kariba Dam on the Zambize River — in what was then Northern Rhodesia — to complete the Fiat film.

Iwerks went on to collaborate with his father and chief engineer Bob Otto on the development of a new production camera for the Sodium Traveling Matte Process. Considered one of Walt Disney's closest collaborators, the senior Iwerks lent his talents to *Steamboat Willie, Peter Pan, Cinderella, Lady and the Tramp* and many other classic films during his long tenure at Disney. "Ub was always interested in improving things," reminisces Don Iwerks of his late father. "He was always looking for a better way."

The Sodium Process is a single camera multi-film method for creating simultaneous traveling matte and foreground elements. A yellow backing, lit by sodium-vapor lamps which emit an almost pure wavelength of 589 nanometers, is placed behind the foreground action. Through the employment of a beam splitter in the camera incorporated with a sharp-cutting interference filter, the foreground action is recorded onto one piece of film while only the sodium light is recorded onto a second strip. Until the Iwerks creation of a bi-strip production camera suitable for soundstage work, the only cameras capable of using this system were Technicolor's three-strip units. The process was utilized extensively on Disney's hugely successful *Mary Poppins* (1964).

Throughout the next decade and a half, Don Iwerks and Bob Otto teamed on a collection of inventions, including a 48-perf pulldown 35mm stop-frame camera for the Disney theme parks' "Hall of Presidents" attraction; the production and installation of many specialized automated motion picture and special effects projectors throughout the parks; and the assembly of a team to develop the ACES computer-controlled camera system employed during production of Disney's 1979 sci-fi epic *The Black Hole.* In 1980, Iwerks began work on the Epcot Center attraction, which incorporated considerable use of 35mm and 70mm film. In all, 125 projection systems were designed, built and installed within Epcot. "In my opinion, that was the pinnacle of my career at Disney," comments Iwerks. "We, as a team, were able to compile a considerable amount of equipment in a self-maintaining atmosphere very successfully."

Iwerks and his team then designed a 70mm 30 fps projection system for the Star Tours motion-simulator attraction in Tomorrowland. Just prior to its premiere, he left Disney in favor of new adventures, teaming with former Disney executive Stan Kinsey to form Iwerks Entertainment. The company would specialize in large-venue formats and equipment including 870 (8-perf vertical 70mm), 1570 (15-perf horizontal 70mm), 3-D and 360-degree systems for museums, theme parks, family entertainment centers, and world fairs. In 1994, Iwerks and Kinsey received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award for Entertainment.

After a roller-coaster of corporate hits and misses, Iwerks was awarded a patent for the Quatro, a 5-perf 70mm reversing projector. In this presentation format, two 35mm frames are printed side-by-side onto 70mm film. The projector's lens and lamp house are fixed to a common baseplate, but between these two, the projector head is mounted onto an air-cylinder-controlled axis which can slide sideways to allow the head to shift automatically from one 35mm frame to the other. The Quatro projects half of the 70mm aperture at 30 fps for the first showing; as it reaches the last frame, the projector head shifts over to the first frame of the adjacent show, which is printed in reverse order, and subsequently runs backward at 30 fps to project the second presentation. With this system, the projector is always at immediate readiness for the next show without ever requiring rewinding.

Celebrating the Spirit of Invention

As Don Iwerks stepped on stage to accept his honor from the Academy on February 28, he humbly produced a golden towel from his pocket, gently grasping the Oscar statuette so as not to smudge its gleaming surface with fingerprints. The audience laughed and then applauded this genuine act of respect for the industry's most prestigious honor. Iwerks maintains his typical modesty when speaking of his achievements, commenting, "I don't know whether I'd call them accomplishments — it seems more like a lifetime of doing things that I've enjoyed doing, with people who have been fun to work with. It's really tough for anyone to take individual credit, because the kind of things we do aren't solo acts."

Although officially retired, Iwerks can't resist the opportunity to continue designing and building prototypes in the Iwerks Entertainment labs. He offers, "I am very fortunate to be able to have worked all my life doing what I love to do, and I plan to continue doing so for a long time."

1997 Sci-Tech Award Winners

TECHNICAL
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS
(Academy Certificates)

Clark F. Crites for the design and development of the ELF l-C Endless Loop Film Transport and storage system.

With its ability to handle up to four hours of film without damage, and its compact size, the ELF l-C has proven to be one of the most reliable and useful devices to automate the projection of motion picture film in a wide variety of film venues.

Dan Leimeter and **Bob Weitz** for the development and implementation of a Portable Adjustment Tool for T-Style Slit Lens Assemblies.

This tool provides a means of quickly and accurately setting the azimuth and focal plane of the tubular-style slit lenses in the optical soundheads of a significant majority of theatrical 35mm motion picture projectors.

Greg Hermanovic, Kim Davidson, Mark Elendt and **Paul Breslin** for the development of the procedural modeling and animation components of the Prisms software package.

Through a procedural building-block process, the Prisms 3-D Animation Software is used to simulate natural phenomena and create particle effects, complex three-dimensional models and motion for feature film visual effects.

Jim Keating, Michael Wahrman and **Richard Hollander** for contributions that led to the Wavefront Advanced Visualizer

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computer graphics system.

The Wavefront System was the first commercial software package for modeling, animating and rendering computer-generated elements and scenes that was adopted into widespread use to create digital images with sufficient quality for theatrical motion pictures.

James M. Reilly, Douglas W. Nishimura and **Monique C. Fisher** of the Rochester Institute of Technology for the creation of A-D Strips, a diagnostic tool for the detection of the presence of vinegar syndrome in processed acetate-based motion picture film.

A-D (Acid Detector) Strips provide a repeatable, quantitative, calibrated check of the presence and extent of vinegar syndrome progression, a slow form of chemical deterioration, in processed and stored acetate-based film.

Philip C. Cory for the design and development of the Special Effects Spark Generator.

This non-pyrotechnical device provides a controllable, reliable, variable and economical shower of sparks for motion picture special effects, while improving safety on the set.

Jim Frazier, for the concept, and **Iain Neil** and **Rick Gelbard** for the design and development of the Panavision/Frazier Lens System for motion picture photography.

This system provides a versatile, lightweight, deep-field and infinitely pointable lens attachment for 35mm motion picture cameras. Through its unusual shotmaking capabilities, the Panavision/Frazier system greatly expands the creative opportunities for cinematographers and directors.

James F. Foley, Charles Converse and **F. Edward Gardner** of UCISCO; and to **Bob Stoker** and **Matt Sweeney** for the development and realization of the Liquid Synthetic Air system.

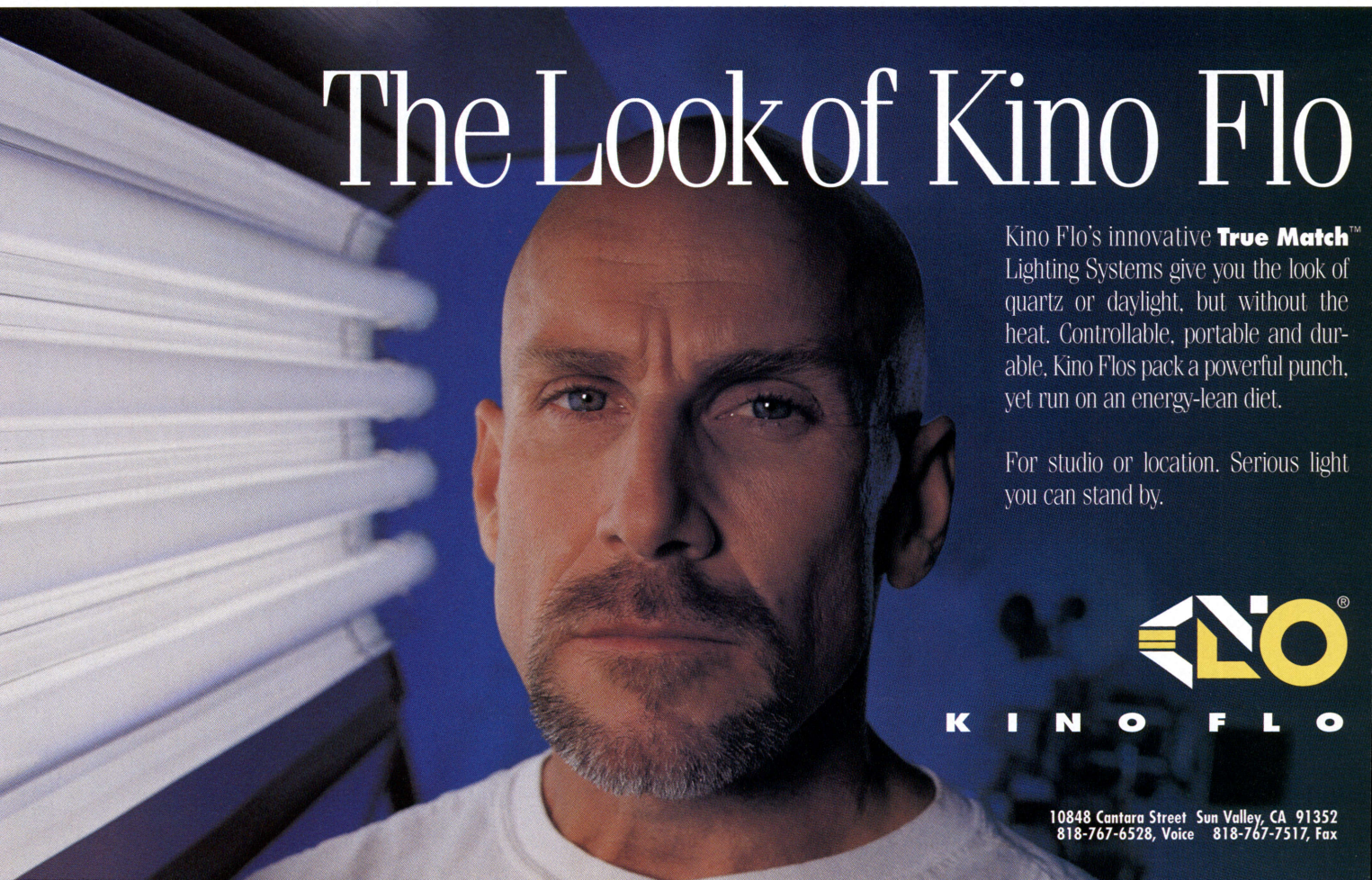
The Liquid Synthetic Air system provides a stable, breathable mixture of liquid oxygen and liquid nitrogen for the creation of safe, low-lying fog effects in motion pictures.

Richard Chuang, Glenn Entis and **Carl Rosendahl** for the concept and architecture of the Pacific Data Images (PDI) Animation System.

Pacific Data Images created an extensible and flexible procedural architecture for computer animation. This early proprietary system is still in use, meeting the increasing demands of contemporary visual effects and animation production.

James A. Cashin, Roger Hibbard and **Larry Jacobson** for the design, development and implementation of a projection system analyzer.

This device permits any



projection system to be analyzed and uniformly quantified with a simple setup. It allows for the adjustment of the weave, jitter and screen illumination for optimum projection performance.

SCIENTIFIC AND ENGINEERING AWARDS
(Academy Plaques)

Eben Ostby, Bill Reeves, Sam Leffler and **Tom Duff** for the development of the Marionette 3-D Computer Animation System.

The creators of Marionette introduced a procedural system for computer animation with an extensible and flexible software architecture that allows creation of high-level controls for the animator. This system was used to create *Toy Story,* the first three-dimensional computer-animated feature film.

Richard Shoup, Alvy Ray Smith and **Thomas Porter** for their pioneering efforts in the development of digital paint systems used in motion picture production.

Much of the foundation for the numerous contemporary digital paint products for motion pictures can be traced directly back to the early work of these digital pioneers.

Kirk Handley, Ray Meluch, Scott Robinson, Wilson Allen and **John Neary** for the design, development and implementation of the Dolby CP500 Digital Cinema Processor.

Utilizing digital technology, the CP500 decodes digital soundtracks, facilitates installation, provides unprecedented ease of operation and may also improve analog soundtrack reproduction.

Craig Reynolds for his pioneering contributions to the development of 3-D computer animation for motion picture production.

The early contributions of Mr. Reynolds in the digital animation arena have become both influential and instrumental in the architecture of many later systems developed at companies throughout the computer animation industry.

John Gibson, Rob Krieger, Milan Novacek, Glen Ozymok and **Dave Springer** for the development of the geometric modeling component of the Alias PowerAnimator system.

The Alias PowerAnimator system is widely regarded in the computer animation field as one of the best commercially available software packages for digital geometric modeling. Used by many motion picture visual effects houses, it has been a benchmark for comparison of modeling tools and has had a major influence on visual effects and animation.

Dominique Boisvert, Rejean Gagne, Daniel Langlois and **Richard Laperriere** for the development of the "Actor" animation component of the Softimage computer animation system.

The commercially available Softimage 3-D system is widely used in computer animation of three-dimensional characters for the film industry. The "Actor" component provided breakthroughs in animation control and efficiency that led to the widespread use of the Softimage program in visual effects and animation production.

Bill Kovacs for his creative leadership and **Roy Hall** for his principal engineering efforts that led to the Wavefront Advanced Visualizer computer graphics system.

The Wavefront System was the first commercial software package for modeling, animating and rendering computer-generated elements and scenes that was adopted into widespread use to create digital images with sufficient quality for theatrical motion pictures.

Joel Johnson of the O'Connor Laboratories for the unique design improvement in the fluid-head counterbalancing techniques used in their Model 2575.

The 2575 is the first spring counterbalanced fluid head to enable the camera to be tilted through a full 180-degree arc. The unique pan-and-tilt head balances the camera package at all tilt angles throughout the full range, allowing the camera to remain where it is positioned without springing back towards the center.

Al Jensen, Chuck Headley, Jean Messner and **Hazem Nabulsi** of CEI Technology for the production of a self-contained, flicker-free, Color Video-Assist Camera.

This device can be used with virtually any professional motion picture camera and provides flicker-free color or black-and-white video assist images. Switchable options allow for image manipulation and increased low-light sensitivity.

ACADEMY AWARD
OF MERIT
(Oscar Statuette)

Gunnar P. Michelson for the engineering and development of an improved, electronic, high-speed, precision light valve for use in motion picture printing machines.

The Michelson light valve is capable of making accurate changes in printing beam intensities more rapidly than devices formerly available to the motion picture industry. Mechanical linkages have been eliminated entirely. The all-electronic design makes it possible to preset the vane openings for each of the 50 positions in its total range. As a result, all Michelson light valves in a laboratory can be adjusted to conform to a standard light scale. ■

For more information on the Sci-Tech Awards, contact the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences by phone at (310) 247-3090, or by fax at (310) 271-3395, or log onto their web site at www.ampas.org.

Thank You!

OConnor wishes to thank the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences...

OConnor is proud to receive the Scientific and Engineering Award for the unique design improvement in fluid head counterbalancing techniques as used in their Ultimate Series model 2575.

Below, Joel Johnson accepts the Scientific and Engineering Award, and thanks the Academy.

also...

OConnor would like to congratulate the winners of the 12th Annual American Society of Cinematographers Outstanding Achievement Awards.

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Double Vision

Director Phil Joanou and cinematographer Marc Reshovsky combine a split-screen frame with experimental techniques for U2's arresting new video.

by Chris Pizzello

Veteran Irish rockers U2 have always paid close attention to the visual representation of their music, from still photographer Anton Corbijn's avant-garde album sleeves to the PopMart tour's towering graphic images on the world's largest video wall (see *AC* August '97). For their latest video, "If God Will Send his Angels," the band once again tapped director Phil Joanou, who helmed their 1987 tour film *Rattle and Hum* as well as several of their previous videos, to create a tasteful and cinematic interpretation of the spare, plaintive ballad.

"If God Will Send his Angels" is a classic U2 spiritual plea featuring the band's trademark theme: the search for faith and communion in a dizzying modern age that's forsaken such seemingly archaic values. Filmed in one take, the video features an unusual split-screen with two anamorphic images stacked on top of each other. In the upper half, lead singer Bono faces the camera as an angelic presence sitting in a booth at a bustling Detroit diner, while the bottom image relates his point of view. As he sings the song, a series of diner patrons — including an older couple, three girlfriends, a pair of firefighters, and the three other members of U2 — arrive at the booth and sit next to and across from him, oblivious to his presence. Meanwhile, all around the edges of the dueling perspectives, life blurs by — patrons come and go, a birthday is celebrated, a couple argues, and a car outside suddenly erupts in fire.

According to producer Jane Reardon, the idea for the split-screen arose not from a conscious aesthetic choice but from a fortuitous artistic accident which occurred in the conceptual stage. "Phil had done a little drawing to show to the production designers," she describes. "They misinterpreted the drawing and thought that it contained a horizontal picture when it didn't. When everybody saw it, they immediately thought, 'Oh great, let's try that!'"

The five-minute slice of existentialism contains a number of striking experimental techniques. To achieve the video's startling, hyper-real look, Joanou called on cinematographer Marc Reshovsky, who had shot some black-and-white footage for the director's U2 concert film *Rattle and Hum*. The director of photography's resumé also includes the dream sequences from last year's eye-popping 3-D episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, which garnered Reshovsky a 1997 ASC Award (see coverage on page 66). His other credits include hundreds of videos for artists ranging from Sting ("Roxanne '97") to En Vogue ("Free Your Mind"), as well as numerous commercials and the features *Red Rock West, Set it Off* and *Most Wanted*.

One key to the video's disorienting feel was the decision to shoot the entire clip at 12 frames per second. "The original concept was to

shoot at 6 fps," Reshovsky relates. "The movement around Bono would have been quadruple speed. But the mix of the song used for the video was a little different from the version we did our tests on, and it was too hard for Bono to sync his vocals at quarter-speed: the playback of the song became this bizarre noise. Even at 12 fps, it was tricky for Bono to lip-sync the song at half-speed. Phil thought that the combination of all these elements would lend the piece an otherworldly feel. There is a strange quality to Bono's movements — in the finished clip, his mouth is singing the song in sync, but his body movements are double-speed like everybody else's. He's in a different world than the people around him, even though he's right there with them [physically]."

Image courtesy of David Naylor & Associates.

Shooting at 12 fps also lengthened the filming duration of the one-take video, extending the song's actual five-minute running time to 10 minutes. A number of non-professional extras were drafted to move into the booth at strategic moments to carry on conversations around the singer. The single-take concept (which was nailed down in nine tries) tested Reshovsky's resourcefulness, since he was required to simultaneously operate two Panaflex cameras — each fitted with 35mm E-series anamorphic lenses — placed in the middle of the diner booth.

"We had both cameras sandwiched together on a single dolly, as close to each other as we could physically get them, facing opposite angles," Reshovsky explains, "At two different points in the video, the two cameras had to pan away from Bono in opposite directions but completely in sync," Reshovsky explains. "We had both cameras sandwiched together on single dollies as close to each other as we could physically get them. The most efficient way to do it would have been to put the cameras on remote heads [using] a single controller, with the polarity reversed on one of them. But that would have been too expensive, and we only had so much room in the location, which was an actual closed-down diner in Detroit.

"The night before the shoot, I got a book on gear design from the library, and I enlarged some diagrams I found in it to the proper scale on my computer. On the set, we ended up cutting two slabs of wood into gears that the cameras actually rested on. We then physically interlocked the gears so that when I moved one camera — both were on O'Connor fluid heads — the other would immediately move in the other direction. Everybody was making fun of the gears because they looked just like wooden cheeseboards! It was a crude system, but it worked well."

Since the two anamorphic lenses displayed a wide expanse of the diner in both directions simultaneously, Reshovsky and his assistant were the only crew members who could fit on the set. "It was like shooting a 360-degree shot without the movement," he recalls. "The way the cameras were configured, there was no way I could look through them, so I was sitting on a dolly looking at the two images on a monitor. My assistant, Greg Rhineer, was using remote focus 10 feet behind me. I also had a lyric sheet with me, because we had to pan or dolly at certain points in the song. With the half-speed playback, though, the song was really hard to understand. Bono would get lost at times, and I would use a stopwatch to tell him the next line that was coming!"

Reshovsky then tailored his lighting to heighten the strange sense of dislocation between Bono and the rest of the diner. "I lit Bono with a Dedo light mounted right over the camera because Phil wanted him to have a hot, glowing quality," relates the cinematographer. "The other people in the booth are exposed relatively normally, but he's got this extra hotness to him. I used white light on him with no gels at all, 2 ½ stops overexposed. But at one point, there's a slight tonal shift in the song and we dolly off to the counter of the diner. When we dolly back to the booth, there's a different person sitting across from Bono, and I felt it was an appropriate time in the song to turn off Bono's hot light and give both of

Stacked anamorphic frames depict U2's members: (clockwise from top left) singer Bono, guitarist The Edge, drummer Larry Mullen Jr., and bassist Adam Clayton. Tandem Panaflex cameras running at 12 fps simultaneously captured the images, which were then combined in post.

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Double Vision

them a moody, blue-green look. I used 2K soft lights with a Lee 115 gel on each of them from a little zone outside the diner window that the cameras couldn't see."

The cameraman also realized that filming two halves of a conversation with a mostly static camera over five minutes would require the lighting to have depth and variety, in order to prevent the casual video viewer's attention from wandering. "I generally like soft light," Reshovsky says. "Kino Flos are more my traditional style. But in this case, because of the physicality of the diner and the moody look we were going for, I went almost entirely with hard light and lots of small sources that would contain the light within specific areas. Inside the diner, I used around 25 Dedolights, Pepper 600s and other tungsten Fresnel lights from 2Ks on down. All of the units in the diner had to be recessed up high or hidden around corners. Outside the diner, we wanted the street to have a stylized quality without looking 'lit,' so I mixed tungsten lights fitted within blue-green gels with pockets of warmer, more amber light."

The members of U2 always exercise a strong voice during the entire production process of their videos, from the initial conceptualization stage all the way through to postproduction. With the help of colorist Stefan Sonnenfeld of Santa Monica-based Company 3, Joanou brought several different color transfers of the video to the band for their input. "Stefan is probably the most sought-after colorist around," Reshovsky says. "He has a very good reputation for bringing his own ideas to the visual look of a project — he not only translates, but contributes. The band wound up choosing a version in which Stefan really cranked up the color saturation and contrast. The version I originally preferred was more desaturated and cinematic, with subdued colors — still very contrasty but not such a

hyper-real look. But knowing we might go in this direction, I lit and exposed in such a way that we would have leeway on the negative. We ultimately ended up doing the transfer off the negative, since it was a little easier to manipulate. The low-con print we had struck for the telecine looked very good, but we felt that we were losing too much detail in the blacks and shadow areas."

At a time when many contemporary videos seem to be going the way of mainstream Hollywood action films — with swarming extras, complex pyrotechnics and ballooning budgets — U2's video is a refreshing return to an organic, less-is-more aesthetic. "Some of [video director] Hype Williams' videos are getting really high-end," producer Reardon comments. "From my point of view, videos like that are very hard to produce! They're using the kind of equipment that's used in $30 and $40 million feature films, when you have ten weeks of preproduction. If you ask the kids, they might like all of the stunts in a Puff Daddy video, but I think videos are like movies: different people like them for different reasons. The video we made for U2 hopefully appeals to their fans, who would probably appreciate an art film more than a movie with a lot of stunts." ■

1998 MVPA Awards

The Music Video Production Association held its seventh annual awards ceremony on April 1 at the L.A. headquarters of the Directors Guild of America. Some of the winners:

Best Cinematographer: James Hawkinson ("Aenema," Tool)

Best Director: Michel Gondry ("Bacherlorette," Bjork)

Best Visual Effects: Glen Barrett and Patrick Poulation ("Transistor," 311)

Best Editing: Jonas Akerlund ("Smack My Bitch Up," Prodigy)

Producers Award: Otto Nemenz

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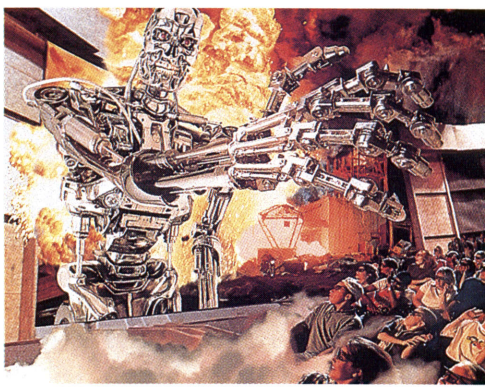
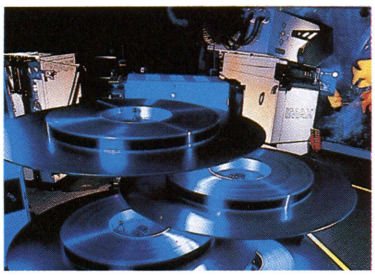
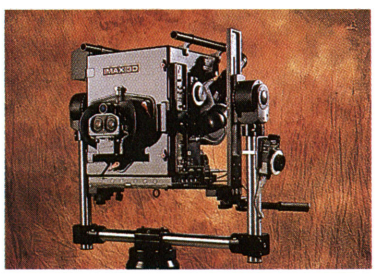


A new post process for large-format films transforms 2-D images into stereoscopic 3-D spectaculars.

by Debra Kaufman

Those interested in the future of large-format 3-D films would do well to attend the Large Format Cinema Association's annual conference and film festival from May 13 through 16 at the new California ScienCenter in Los Angeles' Exposition Park. There, viewers will have a chance to examine footage from two blockbuster 15-perf/65mm films — *Antarctica* and *Grand Canyon* — which have been transformed from 2-D to 3-D via a novel postproduction process that enables any 2-D film or video footage to be converted to stereoscopic 3-D.





Above, right: A promotional piece for Universal/ Iwerks 70mm *T2 3-D* attraction, which was shot in true 3-D by Russell Carpenter, ASC (see *AC* Aug. '96). Right, top: Platters of 70mm film readied for projection at Sony's Imax Theatre in New York City. Right: Imax's twin-lens 3-D camera.

The technology itself was developed by Xenotech, Inc., a company with headquarters in Perth, Australia (not to be confused with the American lighting company of the same name). If the results are as promising as many industry experts seem to believe, this procedure could lend a sizable boost to the large-format film industry. At the end of 1997, Xenotech demonstrated its digital postproduction process in conjunction with Imagica USA, a Los Angeles-based, Japanese-owned company servicing the large-format film community with digital compositing, effects, animation, titles, format conversions and photochemical opticals. Under an agreement between Xenotech and Imagica USA, the latter will exclusively service the new 2-D-to-3-D conversion technology for the large-format film industry.

In the first step of the process, Imagica USA employs its Big Foot 65mm multiple-format scanner to digitize the 2-D film footage at 4K resolution. The data is then input to a Windows NT-based platform running Xenotech's software, where the key process, called "depth mapping," occurs. In depth mapping, the operator is able to isolate objects in the frame via rotoscoping, and then place them in up to 256 distinct layers of depth. Once that process has been executed, the software's algorithms synthesize a distinct left and right eye point of view for the image. The image can then be previewed on the computer monitor and viewed with 3-D video projection. In an iterative process, this image will be adjusted until deemed ready to record. The enhanced footage is than rendered at 4K and recorded out with CRT recorders to discrete left-eye and right-eye 65mm negatives and printed onto 65mm film. (The Xenotech software also enables visual effects work by allowing plug-in capability for such programs as Adobe After Effects and Media Illusion.)

Industry expert Judith Rubin points to the feedback of MacLeod Productions' Sean Phillips (*Thrill Ride, Ahead of Time, Journey Into Technopia)*, a veteran large-format director/ cinematographer/visual effects supervisor, who noted that the Xenotech process may be the perfect solution for SpaceCam, Skycam, Steadicam, underwater, high-speed and minicam shots that are "impossible to create with dual-system 3-D 15-perf cameras." Though the system can be used to convert existing 2-D large-format films to 3-D, Imagica USA executive vice-president Chris Reyna cautions that the "degree of aesthetic sophistication will be differ-

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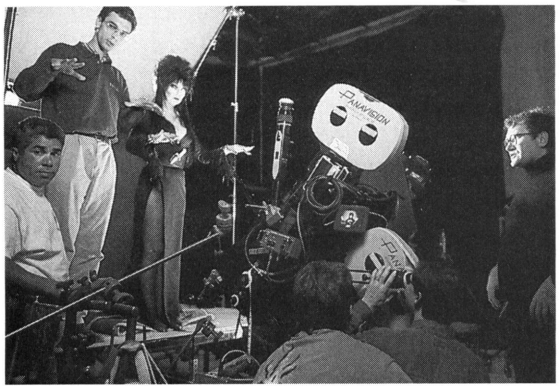

Encounter in the Third Dimension **visual effects supervisor Anthony Huerta runs through a shot with actress Elvira while director of photography Sean Phillips (at eyepiece) checks his framing and director Ben Stassen (far right) looks on. Twin Panavision Super 35 Platinums were mounted on the 3-D rig built by Steve Hines. The 4-perf/35mm was later digitally composited with virtual sets and output to 15-perf/65mm.**

ent between a converted film not composed for 3-D than one composed for 3-D." Though he believes his company will successfully convert existing films, part of their services involve counseling would-be 3-D cinematographers on how to compose the 2-D images for conversion, "because most films are not composed for 3-D and there are ways to maximize the effect for 3-D."

Trade tricks for 2-D-to-3-D production include placing images that the filmmaker would like to see "pop out" in the central area of the screen; an object has to appear entirely on the screen in order to have a full 3-D look. The filmmaker also has to take care with transitions, since the human eye needs time to adjust between shots of extreme depths. Large-format films in general further require that the camera not move too quickly, a condition compounded in the three-dimensional sphere.

As evidenced by the brief history of the large-format 3-D film, this industry stands to benefit greatly from a successful 2-D-to-3-D conversion technology. The 1970s saw a number of 3-D theatrical feature films, but production, post-production and screenings tended to be of rather low quality. Of even more importance, notes Reyna, is that the size of standard screens didn't provide a large enough field to showcase 3-D imagery to its best advantage. That changed with the first 15-perf/65mm 3-D film, *We Are Born of the Stars*, which was produced in 1985 as a joint venture between Fujitsu, Densu and Imagica. Five years later, several other 3-D large-format films, such as *The Last Buffalo* and *Echoes of the Sun,* had joined the ranks. "That established that there was a tremendous potential for 3-D," Reyna says. "The wider and taller the screen, the bigger your cone of vision, which means you now have a larger stage to play 3-D images from. One of the appeals of [15-perf/65mm] is its wide field of vision, which almost equals that of human perception."

The real spark for 3-D large-format films came in the 1980s, when theme parks and expos saw their potential to draw audiences. Shot primarily in either 5-perf or 15-perf 65mm, these films — such as *Captain Eo* and *Magic Journeys* — were mainly shot with double camera rigs and then polarized, a "traditional" route for achieving a large-format 3-D film. The success of these films spurred the Imax Corporation to perfect its own 3-D production system. More importantly, large-format theaters began to expand past their traditional theme park/expo marketplace, penetrating into museums and institutions such as the new ScienCenter. In 1995, Sony pioneered the first Imax theater in a commercial setting in Manhattan, with a venue at Lincoln Square. "It used to be that of the 100 large-format theaters, 90 percent were in museums," reports Reyna. "Now more than 50 percent of the 3-D large-format theaters being built are in commercial multiplexes. In the past four years, we went from four theaters in the world to 31. By the year 2000, there will be over 60, and by 2010, we expect to have 100."

The Los Angeles area alone boasts four theaters equipped to project 3-D large-format films; in addition to the new Imax theater at the California ScienCenter, two exist at Ontario Mills Mall, one of which is at an Edwards movie multiplex, and another is located at the Irvine Spectrum shopping center, also part of an Edwards multiplex.

While there are few existing large-format 3-D theaters, the films needed to play in these venues are even rarer. According to Rubin, just seven 15-perf/65mm 3-D large-format films are currently in distribution: *Wings of Courage* (see *AC* August '95), *Into the Deep*, *The Last Buffalo*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Hidden Dimension*, *L5: First City in Space* and *Across the Sea of Time.* As a result, the growing number of 3-D large-format theaters are, as Reyna puts it, "starved for software."

However, production companies simply can't churn out 3-D large-format films quickly enough to satisfy the marketplace. Imax has only two 3-D cameras in operation right now, though three more are scheduled to go into action by the end of 1998. Iwerks Entertainment is also building 3-D camera rigs. But Reyna reports that "most filmmakers who would like to make a 3-D film are told they have to wait at least two years before a camera is available."

This scarcity of equipment is where the Xenotech/Imagica USA solution comes into play. Reyna stresses, however, that the new conversion process is not intended to replace 3-D production: "You'll still need those tools to create certain kinds of shots. This is not an exclusive tool, but it's another tool, and one that can add flexibility."

There are numerous reasons why a filmmaker might choose to photograph in 2-D and then convert to 3-D. Cameras and rigs needed for 3-D shooting are notoriously bulky and difficult to maneuver, and large-format 2-D cameras are more plentiful than their 3-D counterparts and also easier to use, allowing for faster production. There's also an aesthetic consideration proffered by Reyna: since a 3-D camera is too large to be

blimped, the 3-D filmmaker ends up looping all of the dialogue in post, a process which could be avoided by filming such scenes with a quieter standard camera and then converting the resulting footage to 3-D.

"Brett Leonard, the director of *T-Rex: Back to the Crustacean Era* [an upcoming 3-D 15-perf/65mm film] told me that if he'd had this process, he would have shot all of his dialogue sequences with a 2-D camera," Reyna reports. "If you're trying to advance the art form of 3-D filmmaking, this could really make a difference."

Xenotech and Imagica USA also make claims for the ability of this postproduction system to "fix" 3-D problem shots more readily and economically, rather than having to do reshoots.

But the most compelling claim of the Xenotech/Imagica USA system is that it will enable the large-format film industry to convert *existing* films into 3-D, and facilitate production of even more 3-D films; this, in turn, will provide the much-needed product necessary to fill the needs of large-format theaters with 3-D projection capability. States Xenotech president Robert Baker, "By adapting existing 2-D films for 3-D rerelease and simplifying the making of new films, the new 3-D conversion process will dramatically increase the number of high-quality 3-D film titles available to large-format theaters."

Xenotech and Imagica USA have yet to release pricing details of this ready-for-business service, but according to Reyna the goal is to ensure that the price is competitive so that using the process for a new film does not surpass "reasonable costs of shooting with a 3-D camera or rig." He adds that the cost of the new conversion service may eventually drop in conjunction with that of the involved technologies. Rubin notes that an average 15-perf/65mm 2-D film costs $4.5 to $5 million, and a low-end 3-D film costs about $8 million — while a 3-D film with extensive visual effects demands $10 million or more.

Though no large-format film production company has signed on yet to use the Xenotech/Imagica USA conversion process, Reyna is currently in negotiation to convert two existing 15-perf/65mm blockbusters. No doubt, the test results at the upcoming Large Format Cinema Association will do much to tilt industry opinion, one way or the other. ■

Further information on such projects can be obtained from the Large Format Cinema Association, 8436 Colonial Drive, Stockton, CA 95209; (209) 477-2726, fax (209) 951-8113; website: http://lfca.org.

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Effecting Dreamscapes for Ma Vie En Rose

The French facility Sparx creates a digital fantasyland for farcical tale.

by Ron Magid

Given the increasing demand for and costs of high-quality visual effects, it's not surprising that domestic and foreign producers alike are looking to overseas effects houses to produce affordable imagery. A slew of English artisans devised digital effects for the recent *Lost in Space* remake (see *AC* April '98) while the supernatural CGI shenanigans of *The Frighteners* (*AC* August '96) were created by Weta, Ltd. in New Zealand. Now there is the remarkable case of *Ma Vie En Rose*, an ambitious low-budget Gallic fantasy about a young boy who wishes he were a girl, which won a 1998 Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film.

The feature debut of director Alain Berliner, this picture boasts 38 effects shots produced in little more than three months by Sparx, a French animation and digital visual effects house. The Boulogne-based effects company boasts two Flames, one Flint and 25 Silicon Graphics workstations — Octanes and 02s — and fashion their digital imagery with Softimage, Alias, Maya, Explorer and other software.

The sequences conceived by Sparx for *Ma Vie En Rose* represent the dreams of the little boy and take place almost entirely in a virtual landscape reminiscent of the type of town which Mattel's Barbie and Ken doll would inhabit. "The basic idea of our work was to make his dreams real," explains Guillaume Hellouin, Sparx's co-founder and visual effects producer. "He escapes into virtual land, where everybody is friendly and flying around saying 'Hello.' It's a very kitsch vision of a world where everything is marvelous — the girls are nice, the boys are handsome — and you don't even need a door on your house. The Barbie toys have no doors because girls have to have access so they can play, so our virtual land is a representation of the Barbie-doll landscape. We couldn't say 'Barbie doll' exactly, because Mattel didn't agree."

Sparx modellers built the virtual landscape, a large elaborate tabletop miniature (approximately 12' long x 10' deep) depicting lush, verdant hills dotted with improbable pink Barbie-style houses. Although the little boy's muse, a fairy named Pamela, would be added flying over the miniature fantasyland, Sparx opted to shoot the floaty aerial shots gliding through the model using an elaborate crane but with no motion control. "I'm not very fond of motion control because it can be a very heavy process for filmmakers," Hellouin says. "It slows shooting and reduces creativity. I don't want to be too hard on motion control because sometimes it's the only way to do a shot. But these days, with Flame and CG and optical tracking, we can make shooting more efficient and easygoing."

Of course, shooting in such a freehand sense meant that Sparx's effects cinematographer had to capture the model landscape in one pass rather than the several layers — for example, frontlight, backlight and beauty pass — which motion control affords. While some control of the background image may have been forfeited, Hellouin preferred to shoot the miniature entirely in-camera, save for the beautiful fairy, who was composited to float

A surreal "Barbie" fantasyland of richly saturated hues created by the effects artists at Sparx.

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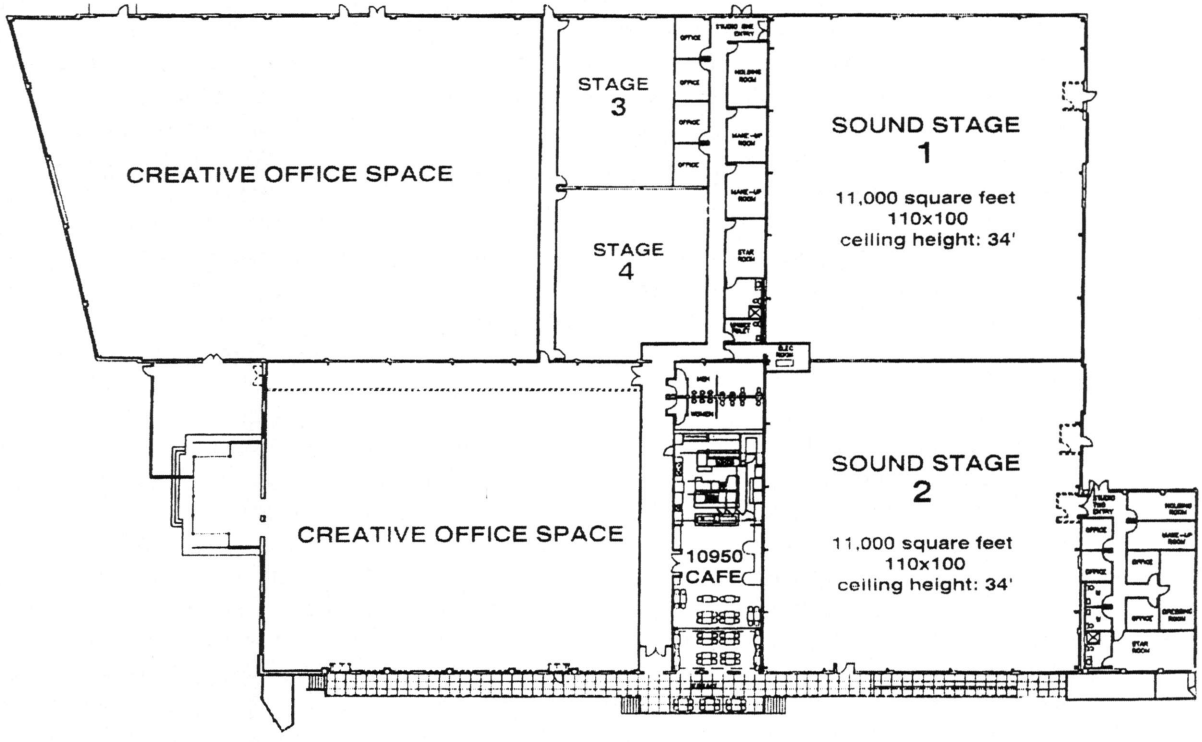

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through the shot. "We didn't have any difficult tracking to do, so we could shoot the miniature as we wished," Hellouin recalls. "We then shot the actress on wires full-frame in the middle of the greenscreen. That way, we could redo the motion almost as we wished and track her into the scene. We shot mostly at 24 frames per second. Some shots were done at higher speed for the floating effect — maybe twice normal speed — but we're not very fond of shooting high-speed because it changes the blur, so we generally try to shoot as much as we can at the speed we want in the end."

Combining the magical images of the glowing, free-floating fairy and the idealized landscape required far more than just pure compositing, however. All the shots of Pamela involved CG animation to create her radiant halo, which was achieved with a proxy model shaped like the actress that emitted particles of pixie dust. "It's more complex than it appears," Hellouin points out. "It's not a pure 2-D process. We tracked the proxy model roughly to her movements in order to lend a sense of volume to the dust, which was 3-D animation done with Dynamation."

Unfortunately, that approach proved a bit too costly for the shot in which Pamela's pixie dust materializes into a collegiate young man proffering flowers, which in itself appears to be a 2-D effect. "We wanted to have something more sophisticated, but we didn't have enough money to go with a CG model tracked onto the actor," Hellouin admits. "We're not very happy with that shot, but on this project, things were so tight that I couldn't afford to redo it."

Nevertheless, the shot effectively conveys the *fantastique*. More elaborate sequences, such as a shopping spree in a virtual market where the food floats magically in the air, had to be reduced or excised entirely. "Now we only see her arrive home with a basket full of apples, which go directly onto the plates where they're supposed to be," Hellouin says. "We also wanted to do a scene where Pamela wants to make a cake, then has the cake done in a snap."

While Sparx couldn't achieve all of their imaginative schemes onscreen, some impressive preplanning allowed the company to produce impressive results with few resources. "We worked with the director, Alain Berliner, from storyboards, animatics and tests," Hellouin says. "If effects are thoroughly preproduced, then you're very free. You can do almost anything you want."

"Even if something seems to be impossible, there must be a solution if you think about it enough. The art direction and the creative process is as important as the way you manage the technology, and how good you are on the machines."

— Guillaume Hellouin

A startling example of this philosophy in *Ma Vie En Rose* entails an elaborate gag during a scene in which the little boy and a friend are caught in the midst of a naughty situation by their mothers. Our hero thinks of Pamela the fairy, who immediately appears at the window and scatters some dust that morphs into a rope which encircles the two mothers as the boys run away. "That was a complex shot," Hellouin confirms. "Although the rope was all CG, we wanted to see some interaction with the mothers' dresses. However, we didn't want to have a very physical virtual rope, we wanted to have something that would control them from the outside through energy, but with good reaction on the body. The virtual rope itself was not touching the dresses; rather, the energy of the rope was causing the dresses to constrict magically. We therefore built a mechanism inside the dresses that actually made them tighten during shooting. We animated the virtual rope using the same 'Disney dust' process we used on the other Pamela shots: Wavefront Dynamation's particle systems. When we composited our CG animation around the two mothers, the virtual rope appeared to actually bind the two characters together."

Sparx Animation and Digital Visual has come a long way in their 3½-year existence. Their first project, *Peter and the Wolf*, was a 26-minute computer-animated film for Canal Plus, with music by Russian composer Sergey Prokofiev and narration by Peter Ustinov. This elaborate short was masterminded by video artist and painter Michel Jaffrennou, who wanted the animation style to reflect the impressionistic painting styles of Prokofiev's time. Jaffrennou envisioned the entire program occurring during one long continuous camera move, first following some birds, then a cat, and finally the wolf as he forges into the woods and meets up with Peter.

At the time, France's postproduction houses weren't equipped to handle the project's backbreaking challenges on a television budget. But Hellouin, then a production manager at the Parisian company Medialab, devised a solution, surmising that a start-up effects facility could spend a lot more time on this type of project than an up-and-running facility, because it would have less overhead. He soon quit Medialab and embarked on *Peter and the Wolf*. "I had lots of time to spend on the project, so I set up a kind of free-form item that could make this project live," Hellouin recalls. "We connected a team of CG

artists, animators and digital compositing artists, and finished the project in a year and a half."

According to Hellouin, the doctrine at Sparx hews to two parallel philosophies: "First, even if something seems to be impossible, there must be a solution if you think about it enough. Second, the art direction and the creative process is as important as the way you manage the technology, and how good you are on the machines."

Since *Peter and the Wolf,* the company has tackled TV commercials, opening credits for *Crying Freeman* and an ambitious slate of animated introductions for a French cartoon series that more conservative colleagues warned them to avoid. "When we started this animated TV project featuring Bob and Scott, a little mouse and a cat who appear in 15- or 30-second segments between cartoon programs, everybody said that keyframe animation in CG was only for feature films like *Toy Story*," recollects Hellouin. "They said if we wanted to make a TV series, we would have to go with motion capture, because keyframing costs too much. They also said that we couldn't have cel animators work on Softimage directly — that we had to have CG guys working with our cel animators. But that would have made the process very slow. We wanted to have cel animators work directly on CG, so we trained them and then reshaped the process. We have one animator per shot, and he does the animation directly on the machine. That way, we get the mood, the talents and the vision of cel animation in CG. We achieved 70 minutes in 10 months, and ultimately, two hours in two years."

Sparx currently employs 45 artists in France and 30 in Vietnam, and is currently tackling *Rolly Polly Ollie*, an animated television co-production with Nelvana. Designed by William Joyce, the show will be broadcast on every Disney Channel in the world, starting in September. Also in the works are a series of feature films based on French comic books such as *Metal Hurlant*, the forerunner of American graphic fantasy magazine *Heavy Metal.* But with *Ma Vie En Rose*, Hellouin has achieved his dream of creating visual effects which are actually an integral part of a movie. "That's exactly the kind of work we really love to do," Hellouin says. "It's very rare to have the opportunity to organize the process and try to capture a vision in the final images. *Ma Vie En Rose* was a piece-of-art vision, and we were very pleased to start doing visual effects for film on that particular project." ■

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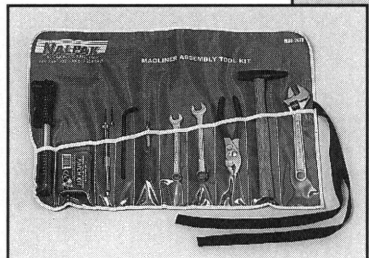

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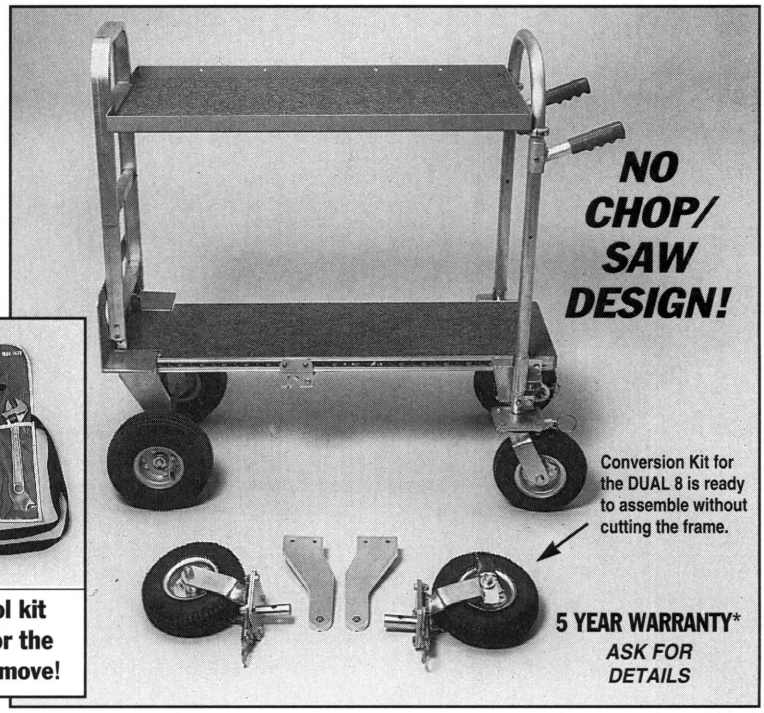

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Initial Images

The art of constructing memorable main-title sequences is being revitalized through the clever use of both production and post techniques.

by David E. Williams

"Design is thinking made visual," noted legendary graphic artist and filmmaker Saul Bass, who virtually invented the notion that a main-title sequence could consist of more than mere words. In the mid-1950s, Bass took a revolutionary new approach to title graphics, incorporating savage, jagged objects and broken type to convey both message and meaning. He redefined film's visual language with bold, confident lines that recalled the best Soviet commercial graphics of the 1920s, while adding a decidedly American twist to the final product.

In 1955, Bass broke things wide open with the foreboding poster and titles for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, director Otto Preminger's take on a junkie jazz drummer. Setting aside images of star Frank Sinatra, Bass instead grabbed audiences with a stark silhouette of a twisted arm. His subsequent swirling designs for Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 classic *Vertigo* tipped viewers off that they were about to undergo a disruption in equilibrium. "Symbolize and summarize" were the words Bass lived by, and his careful choice of single images quickly set the tone for such other films as *Exodus*, *North By Northwest*, and *Anatomy of a Murder*.

So valued was Bass' visual opinion that he served not only as title designer but as visual consultant on *Spartacus*, *West Side Story* and *Grand Prix*. His most famous contribution to cinema may well be his storyboard designs for the infamous shower scene in *Psycho*.

After a golden period which lasted well into the mid-1960s, however, Bass' innovations fell out of fashion until the 1980s, when the graphic artist was called back into service by a generation of filmmakers who had long admired his work. The highlights of these efforts were a series of title sequences for director Martin Scorsese in which Bass and wife Elaine made mini-movies that set the tone for what followed. For *The Age of Innocence*, the slow-motion blossoming of a laced rose succinctly sums up the film's themes of societal formality and sexual repression; for *Casino*, Bass sent a mobster spiraling through a neon inferno, foreshadowing his descent into the hell of Las Vegas.

While a few of today's filmmakers still open their pictures with simple white typography set against a pitch-black background, others have taken Bass' visceral visual approach to heart. Modern production and post methods have enabled these new artists to merge and meld traditional print graphics techniques with moving pictures to create eye-popping impact. Within a few minutes — or seconds — an artful title sequence can set a tone or conjure a mood, utilizing distinctly crafted images to purposefully prime both filmgoers and television audiences.

Working from a stylish, post-modern headquarters in Culver City, the firm of Pittard Sullivan has recently contributed a number of exemplary main-title sequences to the televisual realm, including openings for the series *ER*, *Gun*, *Players*, *Significant Others* and the hip-hop-flavored talk show *Vibe*. Founded in 1986 by Billy Pittard — a pioneer in digital design who was later joined by marketing specialist Ed Sullivan — the award-winning company has also lent its talents to a multitude of TV identity spots (for clients such as CBS, HBO, The Disney Channel, TLC, TNT and fX), commercials (for Lexus, Chrysler, and Pierre Cardin, among others), feature-film title sequences (including those for *Waterworld*, *Wyatt Earp* and *The Client*), and numerous other visual venues.

Discussing the difference between motion picture and television main-title sequences, Pittard offers, "They're really very different. With film titles, you have a captive audience, so the title sequence is act one — scene one of a single story

that will then unfold. With a TV title, you are in a sense creating a 'brand' by extracting the essence of the program and setting the mood in a memorable way, while also providing straight information.

"Years ago, when television was different and there were only the three networks, you could get away with doing a terrible, horrendous title sequence on a show. But today, there is so much competition between so many channels and

shows that you must engage the audience immediately and hold them. Therefore, you must have a title that adds value to the program. Our job is to discover what's particularly unique about a show and present it in a way that honors or even enhances that uniqueness."

This goal is achieved through a variety of techniques, ranging from the simple to the exceptionally complex, depending on the needs of the show. "There are several things that a main-title sequence can do," Pittard offers. "Do we need to tell a back story? For example, do we need to explain what's happened on *Gilligan's Island*? Do we need to showcase the cast members? Or is the title just going to be a mood-setting device? Also, will the sequence be composed of existing footage — either scenes or outtakes of the show — or will we need to do a special shoot or create something with computer graphics?"

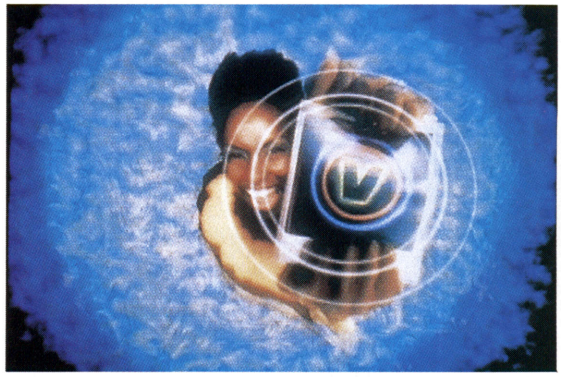
For the series *Significant Others,* a character-based drama about modern relationships, designer Juan Rosenveldt and the show's producers first discussed the series' emotional content, as well as the audience demographics to which they hoped to appeal. Rosenveldt recalls, "They wanted something to suggest that the world is not safe and warm, but without going into any really dark areas. They also wanted a title that would reflect the spirit of the characters and how they evolved in their own universes — all within a 30-second sequence."

In seeking a visual technique to suggest this concept, Rosenveldt decided to exploit the Arriflex 435's variable speed-control function to isolate the show's characters in certain scenarios with extreme slow motion. He details, "We designed the shots to give the feeling that these characters are the centers of their own universes. By ramping the camera up to 96 fps at a certain point in each shot, we froze that moment and created an impression of introspection. We then built five-second shots like this for each of the show's characters, set in surroundings that seemed appropriate for each of them."

As the sequence's frame rate increases, the practical sources pick up a distinct strobing, adding a feel-

ing of displacement to the surroundings. "Another factor in creating this design was the fact that this show happens to have a very attractive cast," Pittard adds. "So it was a benefit to utilize them in such a specific way photographically."

For the anthology series *Gun,* designer Earl Jenshus faced the dilemma of creating a title sequence for a show whose only continuing



character was a pearl-handled .45 pistol (each week, the program explored the devastating ways in which the same firearm affected different groups of people). "The main character was the gun itself," Jenshus says, "and the client was looking to create the mood of uneasiness one would feel if a gun was suddenly added to a situation."

However, due to concerns about glorifying violence, neither the gun nor the sound of it firing could be used in the sequence. This led Jenshus to instead base his visual plan on the abstract notion that the viewer would be seeing the world from the gun's point of view. The idea led him to create "X"-shaped formations within the imagery and typography — as well as crosshair symbols — to suggest that the pistol makes *everything* a potential target.

The main imagery in the sequence consists of 16mm, Hi-8 and Betacam footage shot guerrilla-style on the streets of Los Angeles, with an emphasis on stark urban landscapes and haunting details. The 16mm footage was shot with a Bolex at various frame rates, from 3 to 24 fps, and then transferred at different speeds to achieve a twisted and blurred vision of the city. Various diffusion nets were used behind the lens to add a ghostly quality and remove hard edges.

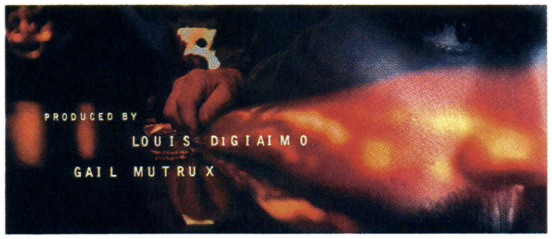
With a Quantel Henry, this material was then heavily layered and composited together with the crosshair symbols and the title typography. To further imply the weapon's aggressive nature, the

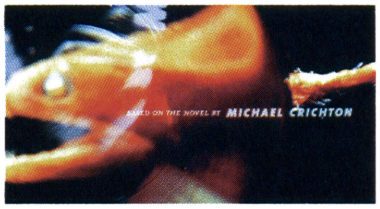
A sampling of Pittard Sullivan's main-title work. Above: Designers Matthie Le Blan and Jeanne LeBlanc created an MT sequence for *Vibe* that epitomized the show's hip-hop flavor. Left: Designer Derich Wittliff incorporated numerous urban Los Angeles locations into the opener for *Players,* helping to suggest a broader geographic scope for the show. Below left: The brooding metallic titles created by Earl Jenshus for *Gun.*

Images courtesy of Pittard Sullivan.

sequence was edited in an abrupt and jarring style and then set to U2's cover of the Beatles classic "Happiness is a Warm Gun." Also adding character to the spot was the use of copper-tinged metallic sheens and numerous reflections—alluding to the weapon's emotionless, mechanical spirit.

Pittard reiterates that "finding a strong central concept for the piece is always the most important thing, which then leads you to a technique with which to create the visuals. We call that 'great ideas, great execution.' Anyone can say, 'Let's use this technique!' and then try to build something around it, but that ultimately becomes a creative trap."





Imaginary Forces conjures dark visions. Densely layered images and multiple dissolves highlight the moody *Donnie Brasco* opener (above); a display of butterflies intermingles beauty with horror for *Mimic* (far right); and deep-sea creatures combine with twisting typography in *Sphere* (above, right).

Of course, those who create main-title sequences for feature films have more time to play with: generally, two to three minutes. As Billy Pittard observed, feature artists also have a captive audience, but confront a different set of expectations.

In business for just under two years, Imaginary Forces was founded by partners Kyle Cooper, Chip Houghton and Peter Frankfurt, who had previously worked together at the Los Angeles offices of the design firm R/G-LA. One of their final projects for that company was the bizarre opening title sequence for the shocking thriller *Seven*. Notes Cooper, "I remember being at a screening of the film, and as our opening credits ended, everyone in the theater actually cheered! I knew we had really accomplished something." However, R/G subsequently closed its West Coast office, leaving the trio to form IF and actually take over their former employer's hive-like offices on Sunset Boulevard.

Despite its short time on the scene, IF has already influenced how feature film titles are currently perceived both by filmmakers and audiences. The company has contributed to such high-profile projects as *Mission: Impossible, Donnie Brasco, Men in Black, Twister, Dead Presidents, The Island of Dr. Moreau, The Game, Lost in Space, The Mask of Zorro, The Avengers* and *The Horse Whisperer*, and has also done extensive work for such clients as Nike, Gatorade, Reebok and The Walt Disney Company.

Images courtesy of Imaginary Forces.

"Creating a title sequence for a motion picture entails a different set of parameters than similar work for television," Cooper begins, "although the two mediums have borrowed from each other quite a bit on this particular point. For instance, I don't think the opener we did for the series *Ally McBeal* would necessarily work for a feature film. It's a different problem which needs solving, although the level of work in some broadcast opens is very high."

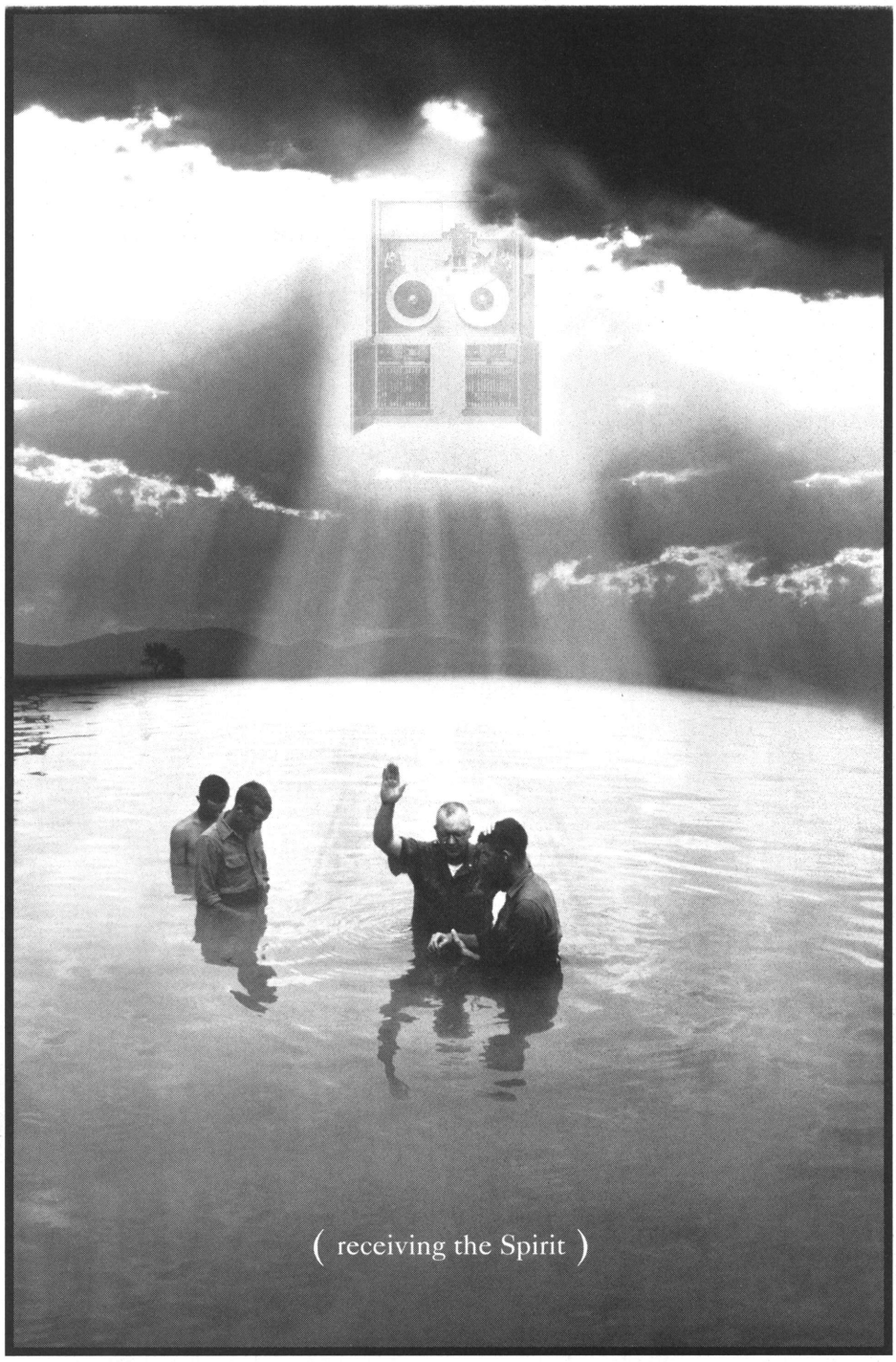
Peter Frankfurt attests, "Although the format and resolution are different in film, the creative process is the same, and we're still beginning with the problem of coming up with a representative visual idea and writing a brief to convey that."

When you work in television, you're not really trying to break the mold; you're trying to find it and adapt it," offers Frankfurt. "With *Ally McBeal*, we wanted people to know and like the character right away. There's a catchy song — almost a jingle — which makes people feel assured and curious to know what she's up to this week.

"With feature titles, however, you're creating an expression of a single two-hour experience. And in some cases, you're mainlining the movie in just a few minutes and getting the audience's attention."

Cooper uses the eerie opener for *Seven* as an example of this effect: "People didn't have to wait 20 minutes for something to 'happen' on screen because something had *already* happened, and they were still trying to catch their breath. However, in the case of *The Horse Whisperer*, [director] Robert Redford already had a scene that he felt was the opening of the movie, and he didn't want credits running over it. For that project, we are instead integrating the presenter credits seamlessly into an existing sequence that was created by Redford himself."

IF also recently contributed to Barry Levinson's *Sphere*, a deep-sea thriller concerning an alien entity manipulating a research crew's sense of consciousness. "Barry told us how interested he was in the staggeringly varied kinds of life you find in very deep waters," Cooper recalls. "He had the notion of beginning the sequence underwater and then rising to the surface, so we took that idea and



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expanded on it, utilizing strange deep-sea creatures as photographic elements. The typography treatment suggested the shape of the sphere, as well as the idea of something turning inside itself — which relates to the film's story."

Since it's next to impossible to photograph real deep-sea creatures in their natural habitat with motion picture equipment, there was very little documentary stock footage available for the sequence. IF therefore had to render the animals realistically in another manner. Explains producer Maureen Timpa, "There's a renowned marine biologist named Norbert Wu, who specializes in taking still photographs of these things. We licensed a collection of his images and the IF team, including Kurt Mattila, created larger artwork from them. This art was then shot using the distortion of various crystal orbs to create a sense of depth and motion."

The IF team, with art director Mikon Van Gastel, continued the process by rendering keyframes of the sequence in Photoshop and assembling traditional — yet photo-realistic — storyboards to represent various creative takes on the concept. "We use Macs for most of that process because they're easy to use and cost-effective," Frankfurt notes. "We have a lot of Mac stations, and they're really our sketchbooks for designing things. After something is approved, we'll move on to use whatever system might work best for the project, whether it's an SGI platform, a Domino, an Inferno or something else." And while IF formerly had to rely on outside post houses in order to accomplish this completion work, the company now boasts its own facilities, including a Discreet Logic Inferno bay.

"I think one of the things we're best known for is using type as visually and effectively as photographic images," suggests Houghton. "*Sphere* is a good example of that. While we were initially going to utilize a bubble effect to distort the images of our deep-sea creatures — to suggest the presence of the sphere in the story — we later came up with the idea of moving the type around a sphere and then removing it so viewers could simultaneously see the front and the back of the type as it distorted around the shape. That interaction added a lot of character to the title. Sometimes you can find what may be an appropriate metaphor, but you'll later move on and find a different graphic solution. That's all part of the development process."

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Houghton sees the work IF recently completed on the marketing program for the upcoming thriller *8 Millimeter* as another example of this dynamic. "The director, Joel Schumacher, really liked what we'd done on *Seven*," he says. "The story is about snuff films and underground filmmaking, which suggested a rough-around-the-edges treatment with perforations and scratches in the film, layering things and enhancing the grain — that's the obvious design route — and we considered doing the work with traditional opticals and physically abusing the footage, as we did on *Seven*. But in the end we wanted to find a different graphic place. Hopefully we'll be doing the titles when it comes time."

The firm demonstrated its versatility by creating a main-title opener for the horror yarn *Mimic* which involved a variety of animation techniques. Since the film's story concerns a species of overgrown insects bent on replicating and replacing mankind, the IF staff, including art director Karin Fong, utilized collections of real insects mounted on specimen boards as performers for the sequence. The illusion that the bugs were moving was partially suggested through the use of camera movement and lighting during live-action photography, which was supervised by Juan Ruiz Anchia, ASC. Cooper, who directed the shoot, attests, "Juan had a beautiful way of controlling the lighting and making it flow over the boards to pick up the highlights on the insects' bodies. We took things a step further by using a little digital still camera to record these rough pixillations that we did with the insects. All we needed were a few frames of legs flailing, which we could then download and integrate into the spot."

IF confronted a specific storytelling problem on *Donnie Brasco* (see Production Slate, *AC* May 1997), a mobster tale about a persistent undercover cop who ingratiates

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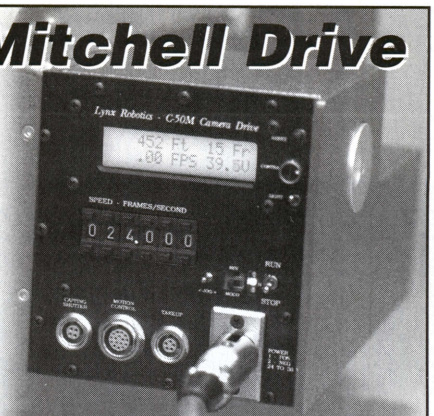

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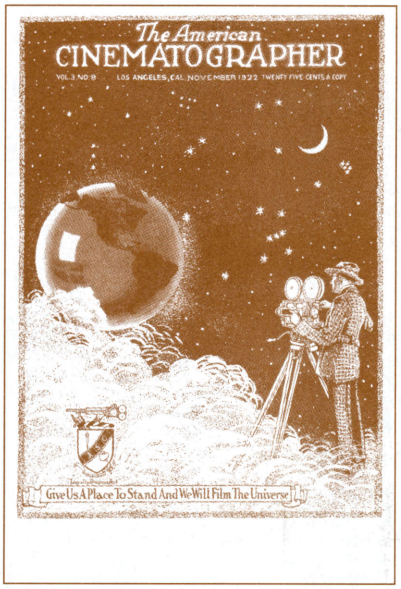

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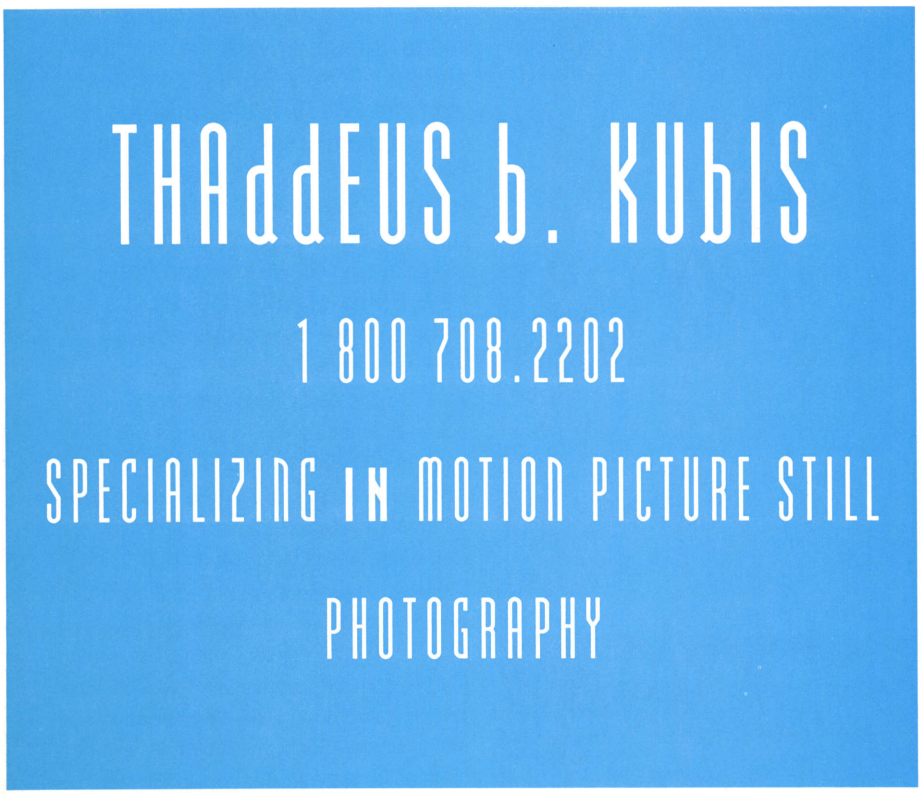

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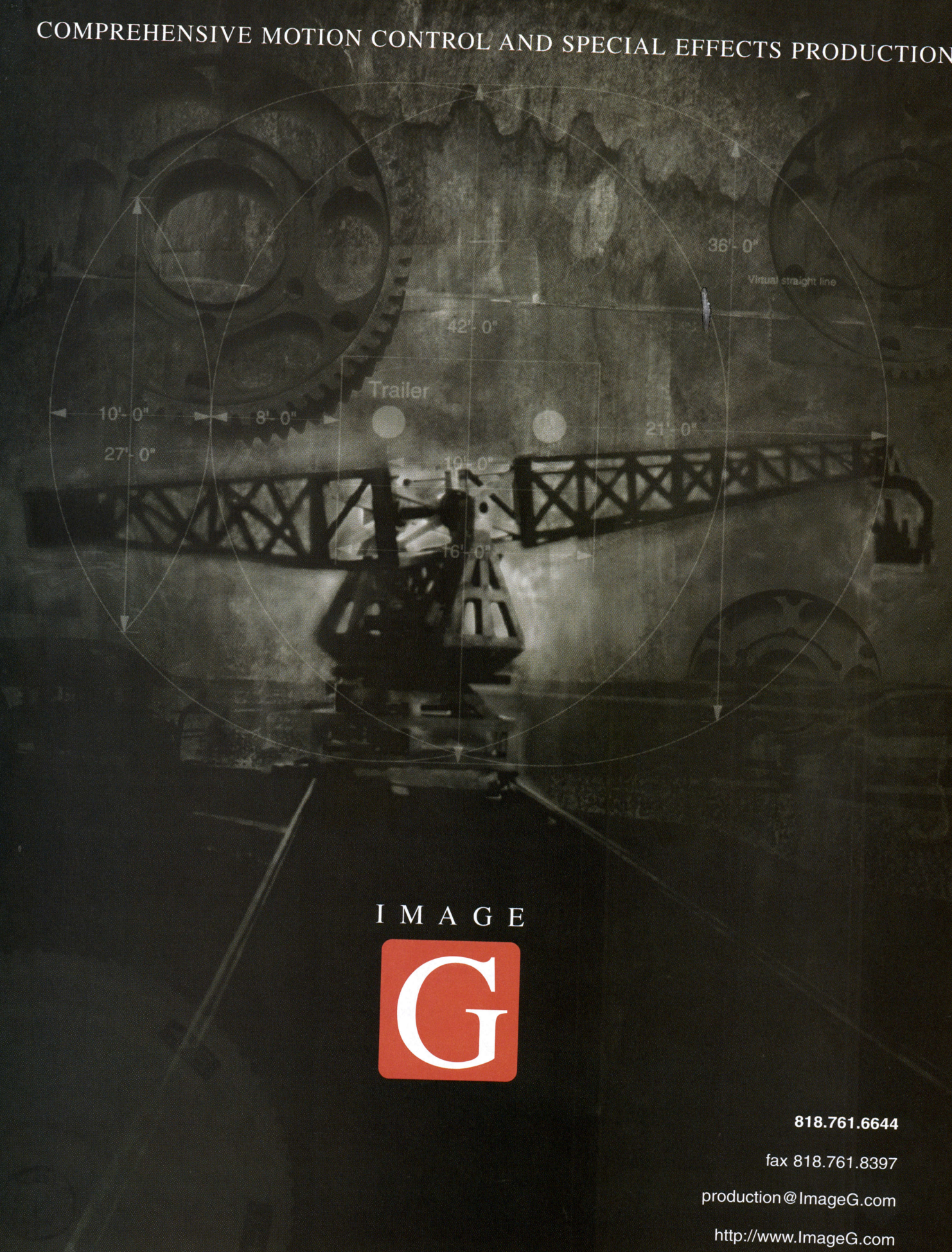
himself with underworld figures. "The test audiences weren't understanding that Johnny Depp's cop character had been spent a lot of time — before the movie started — waiting and studying these criminals," Cooper explains. "We had to set that idea up, and had very little time and money to do it."

The solution came in the form of unit still photographs taken by Brian Hamill; the pictures and their contact sheets were cast as FBI surveillance material and married to simple images of Depp's piercing eyes. "Director Mike Newell liked the idea that Donnie was a predator and the gangsters were his prey," Cooper recalls. "He'd liked the 'obsessive' feeling we'd created for *Seven* and *The Fan*, and felt this idea illustrated the obsession that Depp's character had about infiltrating this crime family."

IF created a frame-accurate off-line cut of the spot, which was then completed on a Quantel Domino. The first step was to input the 35mm still and motion picture elements using a Domino scanner. Each still photo then underwent consistency correction, with an increased contrast adding to the "documentary" aesthetic.

The Domino became a particularly useful tool on the *Brasco* sequence, which utilized multiple cross-dissolves between the various elements. Quantel's machine is well known for its ability to simultaneously handle multiple image layers. The final product was recorded out in two versions: one with text (for English-speaking markets) and one without (for foreign markets).

Houghton credits Newell for allowing the IF team to pursue such an unusual take on the *Donnie Brasco* opener, stating, "One of the most enjoyable aspects of doing a main-title sequence with a good filmmaker is that the more accomplished they are, the more trusting they'll be of your creativity. We're often treated as collaborators and peers, which is great." ■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Caught: A Lost Classic

Legendary director Max Ophuls and accomplished cinematographer Lee Garmes, ASC lent their skills to a widely-scorned 1949 picture that has proven its worth over time.

by George Turner

After Adolph Hitler rose to power in Germany, many distinguished filmmakers fled the country. One was Max Ophuls, an important director in both Germany and France who struggled to gain a Hollywood foothold after emigrating to America in 1941. Ophuls survived numerous minor, anonymous jobs and a traumatic experience trying unsuccessfully to write and direct *Vendetta* for Howard Hughes and Preston Sturges. He then directed four American pictures: *The Exile* and *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (both 1947), *Caught* (1949) and *The Reckless Moment* (1950): though all were excellent pictures, none achieved financial success.

Enterprise Productions, Inc., which produced *Caught,* was established in 1946 by veteran production executives David L. Loew and Charles Einfeld to provide a home for exceptional independent projects. As defined by famed lexicographer Noah Webster, their slogan could be denoted as follows: *Enterprise (noun): 1. An undertaking, especially one which involves activity, courage, energy. 2. An important or daring project.*

With capitalization of $5 million, a $10 million credit line, and a releasing deal with United Artists, the company leased Harry Sherman's California Studios, which was then a decaying Hollywood facility dating from 1916. (Today, the site is home to the ultra-modern Raleigh Studios on Melrose Avenue.) Sherman had once produced Paramount's *Zane Grey* and *Hopalong Cassidy* films at California.

Enterprise's initial advertising listed five pending productions: *Ramrod, The Other Love, Arch of Triumph, Body and Soul* and *Wild Calendar.* While these and other projects reached the screen as distinguished pictures, only *Body and Soul* became a financial success.

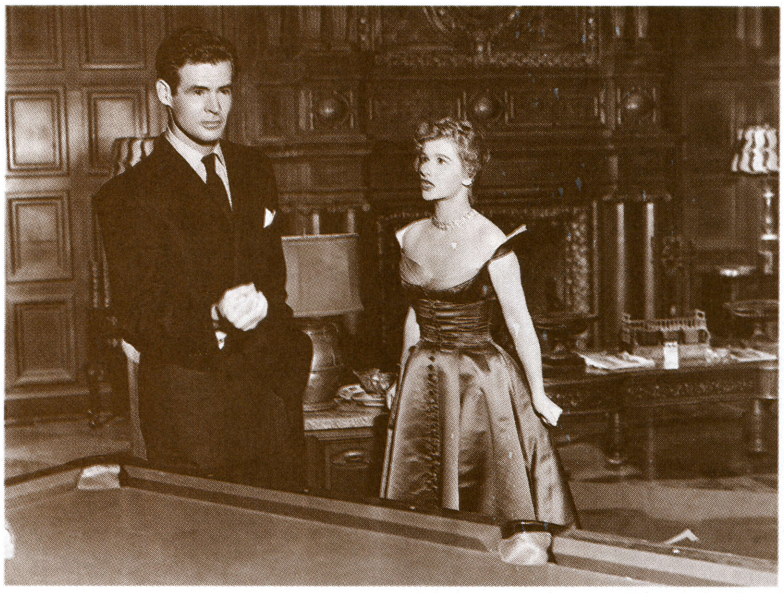
Wild Calendar — the working title of *Caught* — was a novel by

Libbie Block that was purchased in 1946 as a starring vehicle for Ginger Rogers. The tome concerns the unhappy marriage of Maud, a Denver girl, to a wealthy but ruthless cousin, Smith Ohlrig. While most of the Enterprise pictures were made in association with outside independent producers, *Wild Calendar* was to be produced solely by Enterprise on a hefty $2.5 million budget.

Kathryn Scola spent most of the second half of 1946 writing a screenplay that was subsequently turned down by both Rogers and the MPPDA censorship office. Abraham Polonsky then spent six months doctoring the script, smoothing out material that had been deemed objectionable. Several other writers later worked on the screenplay as well, but Rogers found none of their efforts acceptable, and walked off the project in December of 1947. In the meantime, censor Joseph Breen remained miffed about the script's inclusion of a "strange" relationship involving Ohlrig's brother.

On March 29, 1948, Ophuls came aboard and began working on an entirely new script with Paul Trivers. His disdain for Howard Hughes and Preston Sturges manifested itself in the character of Ohlrig, whom he gleefully invested with both men's least attractive traits. Einfeld, however, threw out the Ophuls/Trivers script and on May 31 hired Broadway playwright Arthur Laurentz to create another version, which omitted Ohlrig's brother entirely. Meanwhile, *Letter From an Unknown Woman,* Ophuls' directorial effort for Universal-International, opened at theaters, only to vanish soon after — an artistic achievement that bombed at the box office.

Repeated production delays pushed back *Caught's* schedule while other pictures filled the breach. By the time of the film's planned start date, most of the studio's assets were tied up in what was expected to be its biggest hit: *Arch of Triumph* starring Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer and Charles Laughton. Advertised as "the most distinguished screen event of our time," it became a fiscal disaster which threatened Enterprise's very existence. Ending its connection with United Artists, Enterprise sealed a deal to release its coming program through MGM. *Caught* finally was scheduled to start shooting on July 8, under the supervision of MGM alumnus Wolfgang Reinhardt.



Opposite page: Department store models Maxine (Ruth Brady) and Leonora (Barbara Bel Geddes) dream of glamour and wealth. Left: Marriage to millionaire Smith Ohlrig (Robert Ryan) proves to be a nightmare for Leonora.

In the finished script, Denver carhop Maud Ames comes to New York, changes her name to Leonora Eames, and enrolls in charm school in the hope of becoming a model and marrying into money. She meets Smith Ohlrig, a handsome millionaire, who marries her just to spite his psychiatrist. A paranoid recluse subject to psychosomatic heart attacks, Ohlrig makes Leonora a virtual prisoner in his mansion; her only companion is an effeminate parasite named Franzi. Leonora flees and takes a job with the poor but dedicated Dr. Quinada. Ohlrig entices her back and makes love to her, but after he schedules a business trip, she returns to Quinada. Upon learning that she is pregnant, however, Leonara returns to Ohlrig once more. Quinada comes to take her away, but when Ohlrig demands custody of the child, she stays. For months, Ohlrig subjects her to mental torture. At last she rebels, and Ohlrig finally suffers a real heart attack. She deliberately walks off, leaving him to die. Quinada arrives to take her away and send Ohlrig to the hospital. Racked with remorse, Leonora miscarries, but nonetheless finds happiness with Quinada.

Ohlrig, played by Robert Ryan, was drawn from Howard Hughes, who therefore had script approval. Much to everyone's surprise, the tycoon asked only that Ohlrig be made to appear less obviously like himself — no rumpled clothes or Texas background. A lean ex-pugilist who had become a leading player of heroic characters, Ryan was happy to score an offbeat role as a psychotic villain. Years later, Ryan told an audience at UCLA that "Howard knew all about it and even encouraged me to 'play him like a son of a bitch.'"

Leonora, the story's central figure, was a difficult role to cast; she had to be pretty without being glamorous, and ambitious without being pushy. At the last moment, another Hughes contractee, Barbara Bel Geddes, was selected. The intellectual daughter of famed designer Norman Bel Geddes, she had to "dumb down" for the role, but proved to be the perfect choice.

Kirk Douglas had been

Caught: A Lost Classic

Above: Leonora finds peace while working for Dr. Quinada (James Mason). Right: Ohlrig refuses Quinada's attempt to gain Leonora's freedom. Lee Garmes, ASC composed this scene and many others for depth, as Gregg Toland, ASC had on *Citizen Kane*.

announced for the role of Dr. Quinada, but delays in the starting date left him unavailable. In what was considered a major coup, the most popular actor in England, James Mason, ended up filling the physician's shoes. In addition to the opportunity to work in America, Enterprise's offer of $150,000 plus a percentage and first billing helped, plus the fact that Mason wanted to work with Ophuls. The Briton had another reason as well: his popularity — which had lately spread to America — was based on portrayals of Heathcliff-styled characters who were handsome and romantic, but cruelly domineering. Like many typecast actors, Mason eagerly accepted a wholly sympathetic part.

Ophuls reported to work on Monday, June 21, with a fever and body sores; he was suffering from herpes zoster. By the beginning of July, his condition remained unimproved, so the studio reluctantly terminated him.

His replacement was John Berry, an alumnus of Orson Welles' Mercury Theater who had previously directed four pictures. Berry's salary was more than twice the rate Ophuls had received, underscoring the plight of foreign talent at the American studios.

Teamed with Barry was Lee Garmes, ASC, the celebrated American cinematographer behind *Zoo in Budapest* (1933), which some connoisseurs rate as the finest black-and-white work extant (see *AC* April '95). Garmes had co-directed and shot seven notable pictures with Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, in addition to directing and/or producing several other films as well. He was a lover of the "north light" school of painting, and applied this technique to many of his own movies. For many directors, Garmes was a godsend — one whose singular "touch" could make a good picture great.

Berry definitely did not want a collaborator, however. The director had strong ideas about cinematography and wanted them followed without question, right down to the choice of lenses.

The film's principal photography commenced on July 14 with Mason not yet committed (he signed a contract on July 28) and Ryan unavailable. Both Mason and Bel Geddes balked at working with Berry due to his unknown stature, but eventaully relented and signed onto the film. Due to the production company's financial crisis, the budget was cut almost in half and the schedule trimmed to just 36 days, fewer than any other Enterprise project.

From the onset, Berry and Garmes argued incessantly. When Garmes made suggestions that he felt would improve a scene, Berry accused him of overstepping his bounds. (In fairness, several other directors had butted heads with Garmes for the same reason.) Robert Aldrich, the unit production manager and a longtime friend of the director, sided with Berry, further alienating Garmes. Scribe Laurentz, Garmes, executive production manager Joe Gilpin and especially executive producer Reinhardt were all disturbed because they saw that Berry intended to make a starkly realistic story about a tough gold-digger, instead of the romantic drama originally envisioned.

Berry actually filmed several sequences, including exteriors in Los Angeles and Pasadena, and scenes at a charm school with Bel Geddes, Frances Rafferty, Marcia Jones, Natalie Shaefer, and Sonia Darren. By the tenth day of production the director had fallen five days behind. Much to the shock of cast and crew, Reinhardt dismissed Berry and brought Ophuls back to the studio a few days later.

Aldrich claims that the producers had made a secret deal with Ophuls to fire Berry as soon as Ophuls could return to work, and that he "would guess that somewhere between a third and half of the film is

Berry's." The American director received much more money than Ophuls because Enterprise continued his salary until the close of production, but Berry was denied screen credit.

As in most situations where a director assumes a picture begun by another, Ophuls wanted to reshoot *all* of Berry's work. Some scenes were written out by Ophuls and Laurenz; others, including the charm school sequence, remained because the new budget wouldn't permit them to be restaged. Rafferty, a former MGM starlet, originally had an important role as Bel Geddes' roommate, who commits suicide after becoming pregnant. This subplot was eliminated and Rafferty's name was dropped from the credits, although she still has dialogue in two scenes. Also excised were Marcia Jones' scenes as the second roommate; the two female characters were merged into one, played by Ruth Brady.

To Garmes' horror, the cameraman found that he had underexposed the Pasadena scenes badly; to minimize the error, he had the rushes printed on blue stock. Ophuls told him that the scenes were still very good, which became a moot point because the sequence was dropped during script revisions. The director and cinematographer soon became close friends, and worked together without friction. Garmes had brought with him an outstanding dolly grip, Morris Rosen, along with the original model of the superb crab dolly that Garmes, Rosen and Steve Krilanovich had designed for Alfred Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case*. The contraption was kept very busy in *Caught*, due to Ophuls' fondness for long takes with unusual camera moves. There was an inside joke that "Max would go nuts" if deprived of big sets, dollies and cranes; at the same time, the picture is full of the type of locked-down, artistically-composed shots for which Garmes is noted.

Garmes regularly used wide-angle lenses to emphasize Ohlrig's dominant bulk in the foreground and exaggerate Leonora's minute size in the background.

The most impressive set — and the setting of the film's major dramatic confrontations — was Ohlrig's huge game room, built in California Studios' cavernous Stage 5. One wall was lined with a row of windows extending some 40' to the ceiling. Despite these expansive panes, the room remained dark, with practical sources such as a fireplace, lamps and chandeliers providing localized illumiation. The single wild wall was behind the bar, the area where most of the action took place. The camera made numerous moves in this room, traveling without tracks over the smooth floor. Many scenes, such as the confrontation between Ohlrig and Quinada standing at opposite ends of the bar of the game room, were staged for depth in the manner of *Citizen Kane*.

The extended sequence of Ohlrig's "fatal" heart attack near the end of the film is particularly notable both photographically and for Ryan's virtuoso acting. The striking shot is composed in deep focus, with the top of the bar in the foreground and Ryan some distance away when he's hit by the seizure. He lurches toward the camera, zig-zagging erratically as he fumbles for the life-saving pills in his pocket. The camera follows him closely, with the moves becoming increasingly violent as he arrives close to the camera and scrabbles desperately for liquid to help him down the pills. He finds an ice bucket, dumps meltwater into a glass, gulps it down and gasps for air. Ryan achieved the harrowing effect by holding his breath throughout the torturous walk.

Upon hearing Ohlrig's cries, Leonara comes downstairs to find him lying on the floor, partially obscured under an overturned pinball machine. The camera views the scene from floor level, with the hard-lit Ohlrig lying on his back close to camera, begging Leonora, who's seen full-figure in a white nightgown, to call a doctor. She watches dispassionately before turning away and ascending the stairs.

Another tricky sequence, in terms of both lighting and camera moves, reveals Ohlrig screening movies of a new project to his associates. Leonora giggles at a whispered

Caught: A Lost Classic

Above: Quinada consoles a pregnant and mentally scarred Leonora as Garmes' heavy shadows drape the set. Opposite: Bel Geddes and Mason in one of the small one-shot sets rigged by Garmes. This still covers a larger area than the scene in the film, showing ladders and wall supports.

comment by Gentry (Wilton Graff), whereupon Ohlrig halts the screening. After furiously accusing the two of laughing at him, he orders the man to leave. When Leonora walks out, Ohlrig angrily dismisses everyone. This is technically an intricate scene, reminiscent of the screening-room opening of *Citizen Kane,* with a large dark room fitfully illuminated by the flickering light of a film projector. Garmes used a wide-angle lens to emphasize Ohlrig's dominant bulk in the foreground and Leonora's minute size in the lower part of the frame. After an unusual reverse angle in which the close and distant figures are placed in the same positions (with the close figure at left in both angles), the camera returns to the first angle. As Leonora leaves, the dolly moves left while the camera pans right to follow her.

Another enormous set was the two-story main hall of the mansion, with its massive pillars and high, curving staircase; the dolly was brought into play for long takes in this space as well.

Contrasting such opulence were scenes within Leonora's rented rooms, which are cramped and dark; accenting these spaces are patches of bright light under mazda lamps, which lend the sequences a noir atmosphere. As Leonora discusses her dreams of wealth, she toys with a flyswatter, the shadow of which moves back and forth ominously across her face. Even Leonora's large bedroom in the mansion is made claustrophobic by heavy shadows above the bed, which fill much of the frame. For several scenes in the doctors' offices and waiting room, the filmmakers utilize a technique traditionally associated with British director James Whale: the camera moves parallel to the action, past walls or seemingly through them.

Enterprise Productions was rapidly running out of money, so much to Ophuls' chagrin, the notion of reshooting any of Berry's additional footage became financially impractical. Retakes also had to be held to a minimum, and further set construction was curtailed. Garmes, thanks to his work with Hecht and MacArthur, was experienced at improvising fragmentary sets and making them look decent; he had created the nightclub set for *Crime Without Passion,* for example, out of a few tables, some chairs and well-placed shadowplay. Art director Frank Sylos possessed similar abilities, since he was an alumnus of the most penurious of studios: PRC. For one *Caught* sequence that transpires in a crowded bar, large bottles and glasses in the foreground and the movement of extras in the background cover the set's simplicity. On the dance floor, the camera stays close to Leonora and Quinada — usually above eye-level — with the heads and shoulders of other dancers filling out the frame; fragmentary glimpses of the "set" are of a wild wall and some black scrim. This scenario was shot hurriedly in long takes, with the actors indulging in some improvisational dialogue.

Another effective makeshift setting is the fog-shrouded dock where Leonora first meets Ohlrig. A portion of the dock was constructed on a stage backed by black velvet, with the approaching motorboat's light represented by a bobbing spotlight offscreen. Coupling this source with an overhead dock light created shafts in the fog that provided the lonely girl with dramatic illumination. Elsewhere in the film, Quinada and Leonora meet secretly in a garage that adjoins the mansion; this car stall was actually a building on the lot which was dressed up by the placement of some expensive vehicles within it.

As Ohlrig, Ryan is seen mostly from below eye-level — often via wide-angle lenses — to create the impression that he is taller and more powerful than the other players, and to grant him an angularity which symbolizes his warped mind. Conversely, Mason's Dr. Quinada was photographed mostly at eye level with lenses of 50mm or longer.

"Without a doubt, I think [Max Ophuls] was one of the greatest filmmakers we had," Garmes said when interviewed by David Prince, Peter Lehman and Tom Clark in *Wide Angle* (Vol. 1, No. 3). "A sweet, sweet man, he got a very raw deal in Hollywood. But if you look at *Caught* you'll feel that the camera was looking through a crack of a window or a crack of a door, or that the camera was never placed in a spot in the whole picture that was conventional, like most directors do. He has a wonderful knack for saving his scenes and saying, 'I think it would be nice to do it from here.' And we'd do it from there."

Caught wrapped on October 5, two days after Enterprise relinquished the studio to Harry Sherman. The negative cost was $1,574,422, including retakes and two days' worth of studio rent. Although a far cry from the originally earmarked $2.5 million, the reduced budget still constituted a major expense for the rapidly crumbling company.

Having seemingly placated the censors during production, MGM was surprised after a New York screening to receive word from the National Legion of Decency, a powerful Catholic organization, that

Caught was slated to be stamped with their dreaded "C" rating: Condemned. Theaters which showed "C" pictures were deemed off-limits to all Catholics in the United States. The picture was called "a clear-cut plea for the acceptability and justification of divorce" — a judgment exacerbated by the ending, which made it clear that Ohlrig's heart attack was not fatal but that Leonora and Quinada would soon marry.

The NLD withdrew its threat after MGM and Enterprise agreed to remove the dialogue indicating Ohlrig's recovery, so that audiences would assume that he had died — thus leaving Leonora free to marry Quinada. (The currently available Republic videotape retains the original dialogue, which was replaced by Bob Gitt of UCLA's film restoration program in 1988.)

A sneak preview of the picture held at Pasadena's Alexander Theater yielded enthusiastic report cards; impressed executives decided against any further previews or revisions to the film, and hopes arose of Enterprise's imminent financial recovery.

The bubble burst, however, when the picture, given little fanfare by MGM, opened in New York to sparse audiences and hostile critics. The London opening, despite Mason's popularity there, also suffered a frigid reception. Though Mason's American film debut had been eagerly awaited, fans were disappointed by his comparatively colorless role, however well-played it may have been. In rather acerbic British fashion, the *Daily Mail* reported, "It will be particularly depressing to women who have come to regard an annual vicarious beating from Mr. Mason as essential to a full and happy life."

And so Enterprise, a noble but doomed concept, sank out of sight, while *Caught,* branded as one of the reasons for its demise, drowned along with it. Ophuls returned to France and attained new glory there, but before his death in 1957 he was in the midst of a desperate attempt to procure a contract with an American studio.

A curious thing about movies is that yesterday's failures occasionally become modern classics. Such is the case with *Caught.* Today's audiences would not be offput because Mason chose to deviate from his patented portrayal of romantic evil, that Bel Geddes wasn't a glamourpuss, or that Ryan portrayed a psychopath. The pleasure of watching performers acting against type,

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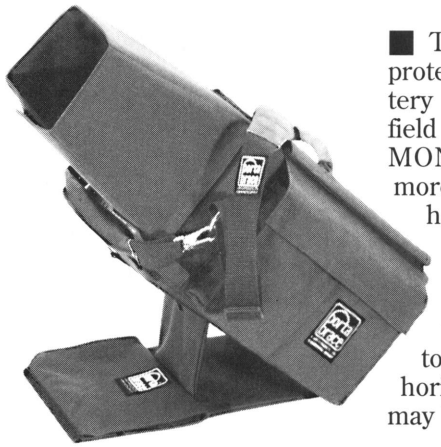

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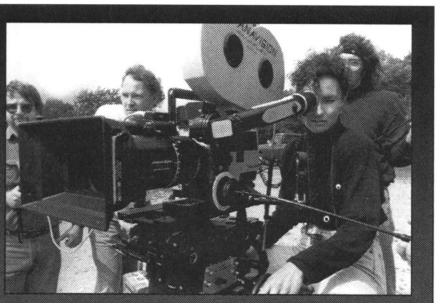

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the subtleties of Ophuls' direction, the artistry of Garmes' cinematography, the richness of Frederick Hollander's Continental-styled music — all of which went largely unsung in 1949 — have proven to be of greater lasting importance than whatever fads prevailed a half-century ago. ■

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer *release; produced by* The Enterprise Studio; *executive producers,* David Loew, Charles Einfeld; *directed by* Max Opuls (Ophuls) *[with uncredited additional direction by* John Berry*]; produced by* Wolfgang Reinhardt; *screenplay by* Arthur Laurentz, *based on the novel* Wild Calendar *by* Libbie Block; *director of photography,* Lee Garmes, ASC; *music by* Frederick Hollander; *conducted by* Constantin Bakaleinikoff; *art director,* P. Frank Sylos; *set decorations,* Edward G. Boyle; *film editor,* Robert Parrish; *process department,* Mario Castegnaro; *montage,* Michael Luciano; *musical director,* Rudolph Polk; *sound,* Max Hutchinson; *costumes,* Louise Wilson; *Miss Bel Geddes' gowns,* Orry-Kelly; *make-up artist,* Gustav Norin; *hair stylist,* Larry Germaine; *executive production manager,* Joe C. Gilpin; *unit production manager,* Robert Aldrich; *assistant director,* Albert van Schmus; *casting,* Jack Baur; *technical director,* Dr. Leo Morton Schulman; *assistant film editor,* Jerome Young; *contributing writers:* Kathryn Scola, Abraham Polonsky, Paul Jarrico, Selma Stein, Paul Trivers; *dolly grip,* Morris Rosen; *still photographer,* Scotty Welbourne; Western Electric *recording. Running time, 88 minutes; released February 17, 1949.*

Dr. Larry Quinada, James Mason; *Leonora Eames,* Barbara Bel Geddes; *Smith Ohlrig,* Robert Ryan; *Maxine,* Ruth Brady; *Franzi Kartos,* Curt Bois; *Dr. Hoffman,* Frank Ferguson; *Dorothy Dale,* Natalie Schaefer; *Psychiatrist,* Art Smith; *Miss Chambers,* Sonia Darren; *Mrs. Redecki,* Bernadene Hayes; *Miss Murray,* Ann Morrison; *Gentry,* Wilton Graff; *Kevin,* Jim Hawkins; *Lorraine,* Vicki Raw Steiner; *Velma,* Frances Rafferty; *wealthy shoppers,* Dorothy Christy, Barbara Billingsly; *Servant,* Wheaton Chambers; *Man in Store,* Merrill McCormick. *(In deleted footage directed by John Berry: Helen is portrayed by* Marcia Jones).

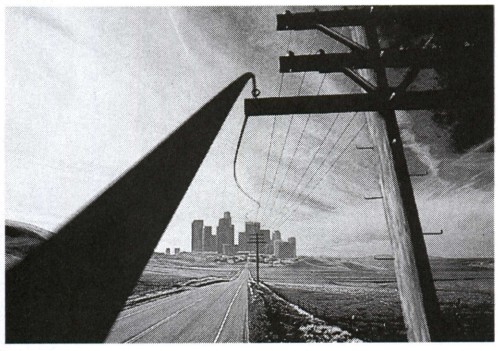
On the Spot

Lending Pull to DIRECTV

by Mary Hardesty

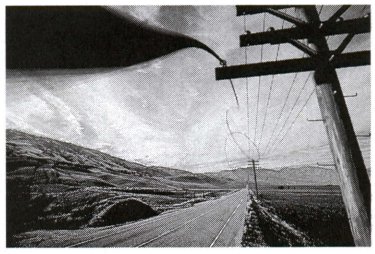
Direct broadcast satellite service DIRECTV's newest spot, "Cable Pull," takes a comedic look at the frustrations that some consumers experience with cable TV.

The commercial opens on a long deserted stretch of open highway with nothing but telephone poles to break up' the landscape's boredom. Suddenly, a cable snaps and whizzes its way from scene to scene, passing through desert, urban and suburban areas to finally land in the home of Joe Cable Viewer, who is busily pulling the



miles of cable off the pole in order to rid himself of cable TV in exchange for DIRECTV. All ends happily as he and his girlfriend sit watching movies from his new satellite service with the miles of coaxial cable piled up alongside the TV.

According to director/cinematographer Michael Karbelnikoff, this spot, which was shot in four days in and around Los Angeles, is the type of piecemeal situation many directors of photography face during production. "These days, a lot of work involves shooting stuff that is very incomplete as it begins," notes Karbelnikoff. "I was piecing the plates together in my mind as we went along, so we would end up with something that the CG artist could deal with in post. Maintaining a consistent look that the CG artists can match is



every director of photography's challenge. Fortunately, we had [Planet Blue] digital effects artist Matt Merkovich on the set with us."

Merkovich realized the effect with a series of mathematical formulas and Lightwave 3-D. He explains, "I accomplished the cable motion through key-framing so it could travel along a correct path, but we also had to snake the motion to achieve the displacement of the cable as it whips its way through numerous telephone poles."

"This shoot was an exercise in seeing things that weren't there," remarks Karbelnikoff, a recent winner of the New York Art Directors Gold Award for the "Toy Gun" PSA. "I started off by shooting a scene featuring a real pole to help make everyone a little more comfortable before we moved to the next shots, which all had major elements that needed to be added in post. I used the lighting tests from that first sequence to set the tone for the rest of the spot."

Although it was more time-consuming, Karbelnikoff shot his scenes with green and yellow filtration and then reshot them without any filtration, just in case the CG crew had trouble matching their effects shots to the filtered live action. "I had thought about also using a skip-bleach process on the film to give it a much sharper-grained feel, but that was worrisome to the CG people, so we dropped the idea. I used an Arriflex 435 with Zeiss primes and Cooke zooms, shooting on Kodak's Vision 500T color

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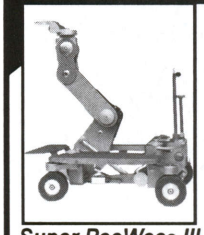

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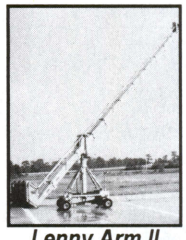

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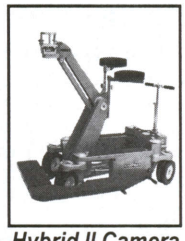

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stock. I used those filters for the entire shoot to heighten the contrast and overload the negative with yellow and green. That way I wouldn't have to push the telecine in that direction so much."

To prevent the actors' skin tones from going overly yellow, Karbelnikoff lit with daylight sources whenever possible and keyed them in bluer than normal hues. "I think the final scenes ended up with a bit more color in them then I initially wanted, but it looked good," he points out. "Having more color helped to make the spot otherworldly."

As a result, the viewer's mind is constantly attempting to ascertain if the footage is real or computer-generated. Recalls Planet Blue's Merkovich, "We composited a tracking shot of a frayed CGI coax cable with the live-action cable for a perfect match as it goes into the house. In another sequence, when the whipping cable disturbs some birds sitting along it, we were able to composite a live-action image that Karbelnikoff shot of one bird multiple times with the CGI wires and poles we created.

Adds Karbelnikoff, "We spent a lot of time shooting close-ups of the birds in front of a greenscreen on a stage in L.A. But the greenscreen wasn't big enough to get the wide-angle lens shot I needed of them flying, so we moved outdoors. Even though it wasn't a very blue sky, I was able to overexpose the overcast sky enough so that it worked as a luminance matte against the black birds. Because it was a wide enough shot, and we didn't have to get too close to see the details in the features, it worked fine. I keyed the birds with as bright a light as I could, and then overexposed the sky as much as I could, so it would go white without eating into the birds' features. We couldn't have cheated the shot to make a matte like that if it had been a close-up."

Another detail Karbelnikoff used to intensify the spot's surreal quality was to take two different exposures for all of the background landscape scenes. "If you want a natural-looking sky, you need a lot of saturation, but if you expose for the sky correctly, your foreground will go very dark," he observes. "Fortunately, we had the luxury of shooting the sky at its correct exposure to get the best-looking image, and then shot the ground at its optimum exposure and put the two together to get a postcard-perfect background plate."

One of the most emphatic scene transitions, however, was actually an in-camera effect. "We needed a smooth transition from the DIRECTV show airing on the television to the guy on the couch, so I simply lined up full-frame on the TV image and then snap-zoomed and panned to the couple on the couch," explains Karbelnikoff, who used a special control box to eliminate any television flicker, and transferred the film to tape at 29.999 fps to help fool the viewer's mind into believing that the movie is being watched in real time. "It used to be that if you got too close to a television set that had a program airing, there was a moiré effect, but the new Spirit DataCine transfer machine transfers film to tape at such a high resolution that it has virtually eliminated the moiré effect, which is caused by a lack of information in pixels."

When asked for any advice he would offer to directors of photography who are contemplating shooting an effects-laden spot, Karbelnikoff replies, "In the last year, the post guys have gotten a lot more latitude. With the advent of the new Vision stocks from Kodak and the incredible leaps in computer and software technology, any cinematographer who is not going to his transfers, or at least the final transfer, is negating a whole side of his craft, because a lot of the people sitting in that transfer room aren't as visually oriented as a cinematographer. By being there, you can ensure that the spot looks something like you intended it too, and also have a chance to take your work a step further." ■

CREDITS

Client: DIRECTV, Inc.

30-Second Spot: Cable Pull

Director/Cinematographer:
Michael Karbelnikoff

Production Company:
HKM Productions, Los Angeles

Agency:
Campbell Ewald Advertising, Los Angeles

Visual Effects:
Planet Blue, Hollywood

New Products

compiled by Andrew O. Thompson

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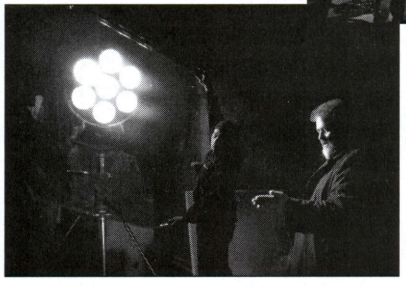

function serves for filling large diffusion or bounce media frames. Tandem beam focusing maximizes the full output potential for the lamps comprising the unit. Each of the outer lamps may be rotated 360 degrees for independent beam control. The Ruby Seven will operate in any position and can be used with accessories such as scrims, barn doors and the Senior Chimera light bank (with wide lamps).

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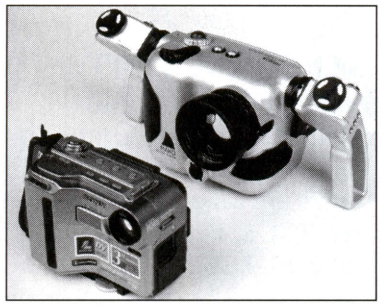
Eastman Kodak has developed a hybrid film designed for digital compositing applications. Kodak SFX 200T color negative film is optimized for "traveling matte" shots where foreground action is recorded in front of blue or green background screens. The new film is rated for an EI of 200 in 3200°K light. This emulsion is designed to intercut seamlessly with other Kodak color negative films used to record live-action footage for scenes adjacent to the effects shot. Notes John Brewer, research scientist for Kodak's Professional Motion Imaging Division, "When this special-purpose film is scanned into the digital format, characters and objects in the foreground can be separated more cleanly from the background screen. That may be especially helpful in certain composite shots. In those situations, this film can save time in postproduction."

For further details on this new stock, see this month's Points East column (page 115) regarding the use of SFX 200T for Dream Quest Images' work on the upcoming Disney remake of *Mighty Joe Young*.

Contact your local Kodak representative for further information.



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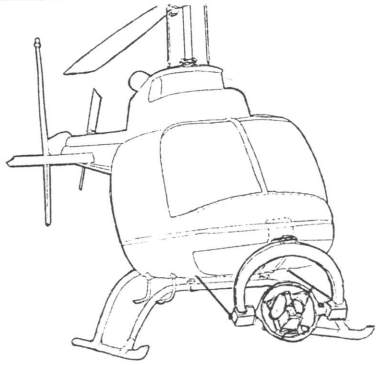

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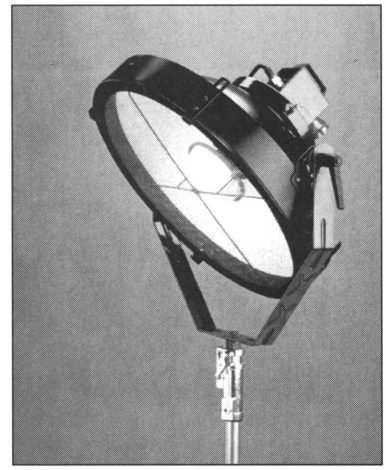
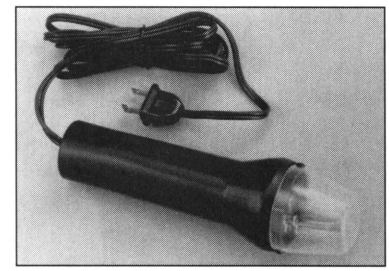


New Bogen Products

BogenCine introduces a powerful 4K MSR (HMI) light source to the 800 series Aurasoft line. The new lampholder for the 800 series brings added illumination power to Aurasoft's reflector design; it produces a softness exactly like indirect natural light. The reflector utilizes thousands of tiny, injection-molded, spheroidal mirrors to reflect light in all directions, in an arc of about 120 degrees. These tiny bubble mirrors of varying sizes are arranged in totally random patterns and throw overlapping reflections that mix and soften the light.

Also offered is a new universal ballast that is compatible with all major brands of small (125- to 270-watt) HMI/HSR daylight lampheads and DC power sources, including the full Anton/Bauer Snap-on battery series. The Optex Omni-Ballast eliminates the need for brand-specific, dedicated ballasts and customized battery/charging systems. The unit is light, compact and easy-to-carry, and comes with a comfortable shoulder strap; it is dimmable to 60 percent with hot restrike capability and features a battery life indicator and safety cutoff voltage limiter.

Bogen Photo Corp., (201) 818-9500, fax (201) 818-9177, e-mail: info@bogenphoto.com.



Slender Strobe

The Great American Market introduces the StarStrobe 3, a high-powered strobe light which features a beam that can reach up to 150' and an estimated life of five million flash-cycles. This source is also programmable and can be plugged into most dimmer console units; the unit is therefore easy to change, and can function independently or in unison with other StarStrobe units. The durable plastic housing has a clear UVEX cover that can be removed to add any GAMColor for desired effects.

GAM, (213) 461-0200, fax (213) 461-4308

High-Capacity Batteries

LentEquip Inc. of Toronto, Canada is introducing a new means of powering Arriflex SR-2 and SR-3 16mm cameras. In

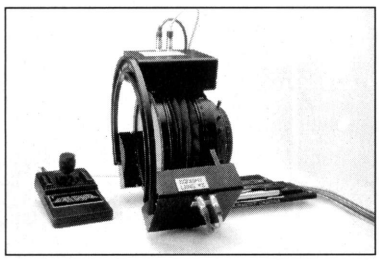
LentEquip's new on-boards, the voltage has been increased to 26.4 volts, 2.5Ah for the SR-3 and 14.4 volts, 3.0Ah for the SR-2. These on-boards feature an externally visible power indicator to advise when it is time to recharge the pack and warn when the voltage is below the critical level. In addition to its injection-molded construction, premium Ni-Cad cells are used. An optional three-pin Fischer accessory output connector can be ordered with the SR-3 battery to directly power peripherals. Packages are available that include four batteries, a four-channel smart charger, four charging cables and a fitted case.

LentEquip Inc., (416) 406-2442, fax: (416) 406-2443, e-mail: info@lentequip.com.

Squishy Lens

Clairmont Camera announces its new squishy lens, which was designed to create distortion effects typically made with a flexible lens element; this is achieved via a specially formulated flexible supplemental element compressed by a mechanism generating more than 200 pounds of force.

As the forward plate compresses the squishy element, it creates an area where light rays entering the taking lens are undisturbed, while the area around the "clear zone" is curved, defocusing the entering rays. Computer-controlled actuators accept input from the three-axis joystick, translating the coordinates into motor commands which, in turn, squeeze the squishy element. As this element is compressed more, the "clear zone" increases in diameter. This allows more rays to reach the film plane undisturbed and creates a variable "tunnel vision" effect. The clear zone location can also be changed via the joystick. The unit is compact and weighs 15 pounds. It



35 MM REFLEX

The Fries model 435 is a new general purpose MOS production 35mm camera. With its optical printer compatible register pins, steadiness and 150 FPS speed. The 435 is ideally suited for special effects, commercials or any photography where a quality steady image is desired.

The 435 is a spinning mirror reflex camera with a 170 degree blanking shutter. The internal 30VDC motor runs the camera from 2 to 150 FPS forward and 2 to 50 FPS reverse, in one frame increments all crystal. The camera is equipped with take-up and supply torque motors.

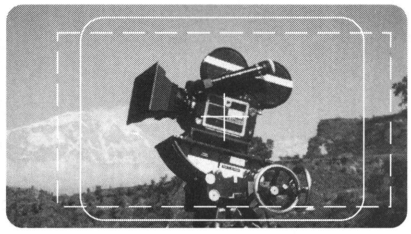
There are both 1000 ft. and 400 ft. displacement type magazines. A new feature is the light valve which allows the operator to direct all the light to the viewing system, or to the video assist, or combo which splits the light between both viewing and video assist.

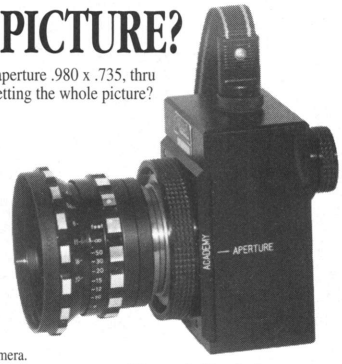
35 mm, Reflex Camera

WHY NOT SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE?

The new Fries Director's Viewfinder allows the director to view the full camera aperture .980 x .735, thru the same lenses that will be used on the camera when filming. Why aren't you getting the whole picture?

Ground Glass 1.85 & T.V. on Academy Center line shown





Film Clip: The finder has a set of register pins that will hold a film clip the same as the Fries camera.
Groundglasses: Interchangeable. The same groundglass as is used in the Fries 35R and 35R3 cameras.

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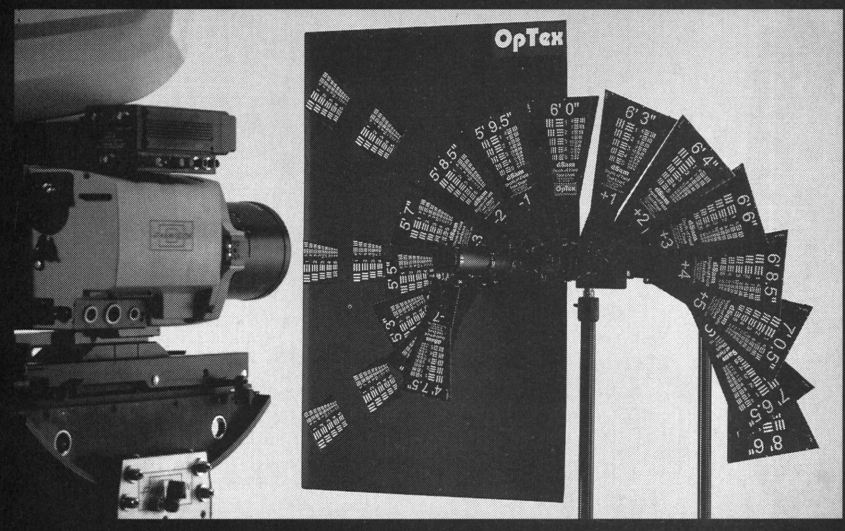

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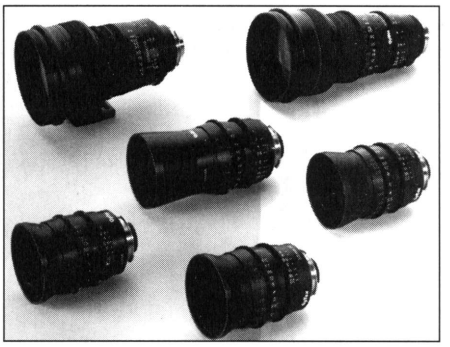
Clairmont Cameras, (818) 761-4440, fax (818) 761-0861.

Electronic Primes

Optex has introduced their new HD Electronic Cinematography lenses, which fill the need for high-quality mid-range prime lenses suitable for Digital Betacam, DVC Pro and the new HDTV ⅔" cameras. The lens range includes a 40mm T3, 50mm T3, 80mm T2.8, 150mm T3, 200mm T2.3 and 300mm T3.2. In keeping with Optex's EC zoom lenses, the HDEC lenses have a low-reflection, acrylic black finish; the iris scale is calibrated in T-stops, while the focus scale is engraved in both feet and meters. Both the iris and focus feature large, highly



visible scales and, where possible, are engraved on both sides of the lens. They also feature built-in 0.8 modulus gear rings compatible with studio follow-focus rigs, fluid-drive units and motorized-control systems. Extenders in the 1.4x and 2x range are also available to further increase the lenses' versatility.

Optex, 44(0) 181-441-2199, fax 44(0) 181-449-3646, e-mail: info@optex-int.com.

Multi-Purpose Digital Camera

Panasonic presents its new AW-E560 3-CCD digital signal processing (DSP) multi-purpose camera, which is compact, lightweight and of a one-piece box type. The camera's flexibility makes it useful for a variety of medical uses, as well as broadcast and newsroom point-of-view, high-quality graphics, teleconferencing and sports applications. This unit features improved sensitivity (to 2000 lux at f9.5), reduced vertical smear of 20dB (greatly reducing the line separations from background variances), and a minimum illumination of 5 lux. It features three 400,000-pixel, ½" high-density, high-sensitivity Interline Transfer (IT) CCDs and achieves 800 lines of horizontal resolution at a signal-to-noise ratio greater than 62dB. Its digital adjustments include gamma, detail frequency and level, and dark detail; electronic light control varies exposure without auto iris for demanding light conditions. The camera also offers a synchro-scan shutter, auto-tracing, automatic or manual white balance with paint ability, a built-in character generator for time and date function, and tilting video productions. It generates full or SMPTE color bars and features a standard prism assembly and bayonet lens mount. RGB, Y/C, component and composite outputs provide easy compatibility with virtually any format of VCR or desktop system. The optional RS-232C control is available for personal PC use. The camera can be operated from a distance of up to 300 meters by using the WV-RC700A remote-control unit, or from distances up to 50 meters by using the WV-CB700A remote control box.

Panasonic, (800) 528-8601.

Rocker Plate

With MovieTech's Rocker Plate, a camera operator can position the camera at very low levels or very close to the actual subject. It can also serve as camera support for interior shots in automobiles or at any location where it is impractical to use a tripod.

This unit enables 360 degrees of panning on its own axis and has a stepless adjustable friction brake. The total tilt range is 86 degrees. The double-sided tilt system permits a camera weighing up to 88 lbs. (40 kg) to be positioned and locked off at any stage. The panhandle can be fitted on both sides of the Rocker

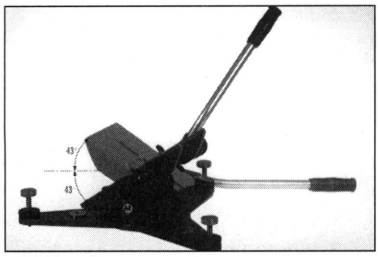
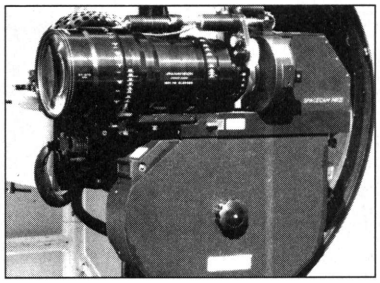


Plate to accommodate either left- or right-handed operators; it is based on a three-legged spoke base with an integrated water level and leveling spikes. The unit weighs 12 lbs. (5.5kg), and the height of the tilt plate is 4.3" (110mm). A transport case is optionally available in dimensions of 18" x 14" x 6".

MovieTech, (089) 434081, fax (089) 4312961, e-mail: 113206.1105@compuserve.com



SpaceCam-Compatible Lens

SpaceCam Systems announces the application of Panavision's 11:1 zoom to its gyrostabilized camera system. This T2.8 lens, which offers large range and facilitates low-light shooting, maintains excellent stability on the SpaceCam despite its size and weight.

SpaceCam Systems, (818) 889-6060, fax (818) 889-6062.

Cinema Calculator

Zebra Films has now released the Psion Series 5 palmtop computer. The program, based on its successful predecessor for the Psion Series 3, carries out all calculations for people working in the film business. It is intended for cinematographers, assistant cameramen and gaffers. The Psion computers have the well-known pulldown menu structure common to every Windows-based program — the operating system is easy to use and to understand. This software version benefits from the larger touch-

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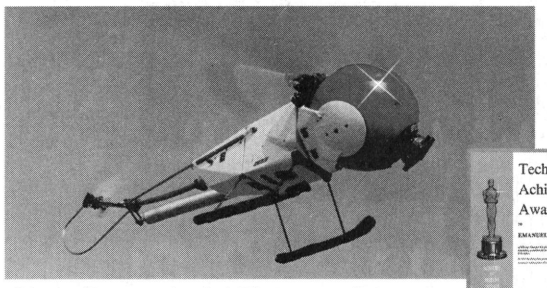

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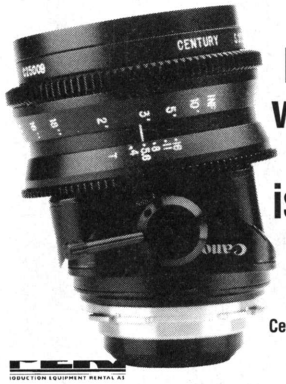

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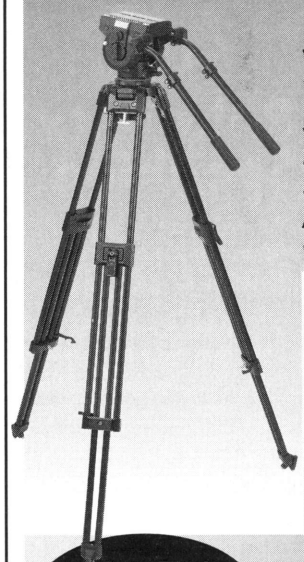

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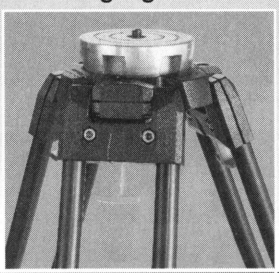

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Zebra Film, (31) 20 4080400, fax (31) 20 4082339; e-mail: zebra@xs4all.nl

Daylight Monitor

The Glidecam Eclipse Monitor is intended for use wherever a professional daylight-viewable monitor is required. The unit works well when used on the Glidecam V-16 or V-20, and can also be adapted for other industry-standard camera-stabilizer sleds. Weighing 4.9 lbs. and easily powered by an external 12V DC battery or power supply, the Eclipse can be also be used as an over-sized daylight-readable viewfinder or set monitor and can be attached virtually anywhere. Its specifications are as follows: a viewable display of 5.5"; one NTSC composite video input; an external voltage supply of 12V DC at 700mA to 1.5A max; and a typical CRT life of 20,000 hours. The entire unit measures 6" x 6" x 9".

Glidecam Industries, (800) 949-2089, fax (508) 866-2199, internet: www.glidecam.com.

Paint System/ Digital Fusion Post

Eyeon Software announces it full-featured vector-based paint system; this fully-integrated paint system will ship with Digital Fusion Version 2 and Digital Fusion Post late this year. In conjunction with this new feature, the latest version of the software Digital Fusion Post was featured exclusively at NAB. DFP has of the functionality of Digital Fusion Version 2 with added capabilities. Digital Fusion Post also supports Cineon file format for film, including lookup tables, color-matching and calibration. This version also boasts 64-bit color fidelity and supports popular SCSI tape formats such as DLT and Exabyte. Digital Fusion Post also includes Ultimatte technology and color LUT support.

Eyeon Software, (800) 862-0004, website: www.eyeonline.com. ■

Points East

Going Ape Over Kodak's New Effects Emulsion

by Eric Rudolph

Upon being hired to provide the effects work for Walt Disney Studios' impending remake of the 1949 gorilla thriller *Mighty Joe Young*, Dream Quest Images senior visual effects supervisor Hoyt Yeatman knew that a great deal of traveling mattes would be entailed, so he began testing stocks by filming an actor in a gorilla costume against a bluescreen. But when the oversized ape encountered the greater resolving power of digital compositing, a flurry of activity ensued which resulted in Kodak's new visual effects emulsion, which produces cleaner edge characteristics for traveling-matte work.

Yeatman notes, "When you have a character like Mighty Joe Young, who is a dark brownish-black, the tendency is to heavily backlight to provide definition. We did that, and the results looked great. However, when we digitally composited the negative with a background, I found strange anomalies on the character's edges, such as reddish halos or fringing in the highlights, where the backlight was shining through the partially translucent hair fibers."

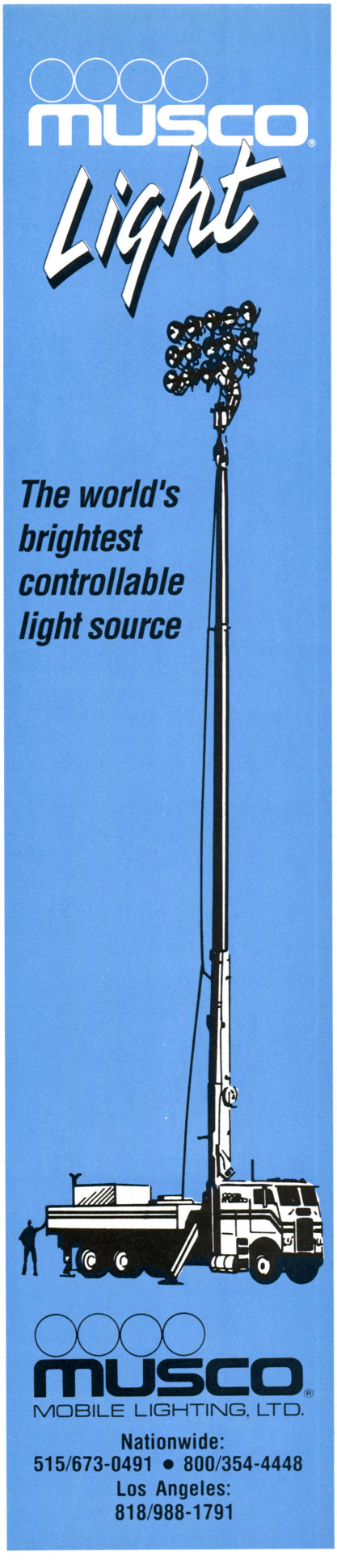
Such inconsistencies did not seem right to Yeatman. "With today's digital technology, you should be able to get a perfect traveling matte if you do your homework and shoot it properly. I looked at the negative with a 50-power microscope and saw that there was a cyan bias around the edges of the character as we went toward the highlights, between middle gray and white. I thought it might have been the lenses, but I ran tests and found that everything from Panavision Primos to lower-end still lenses created this same fringing problem. I started trying different film stocks, and the amount of this unwanted effect varied, from very pronounced to the least amount, which was with the old 5247."

Yeatman contacted his local Kodak representative and presented him with the test material; the rep suggested that the tests be sent along to the company's home base in Rochester, New York. Yeatman was then invited to Kodak central to give an official presentation on the strange artifacts, which he felt would prevent Dream Quest from doing the best job of producing a realistic-looking gorilla in bright exteriors for *Mighty Joe Young*.

Yeatman spent two days with Kodak's emulsion designers, who reproduced the tests and found that the artifacts did not appear when the negative was printed to film. Explains Yeatman, "A print has much less dynamic range than a negative does. However, with digital technology you're seeing the negative for what it is, so if there is some defect built into the negative, it will show up as big as life."

"In the next few years, more and more postproduction is going to occur digitally," he states. "The day is coming soon when your motion picture negative will be transferred at a high resolution to a digital medium and you will edit on an Avid or a Lightworks, and then create your actual release print or internegative directly from that high-res digital transfer, not by going back to the original negative. So negatives must now be robust enough to hold up to digital's higher level of scrutiny."

Back in Rochester, Kodak engineers Mike Culligan, Don Hunger, Marty Feinberg and Bob Wilson concocted experimental film stocks for about six months, cranking out scores of 200' rolls on pilot machines. After a while, Kodak felt the time had come to test the various emulsions. "They came back to Dream Quest with 10 rolls of film," expounds Yeatman. "Eight of the rolls were new formulas and two were



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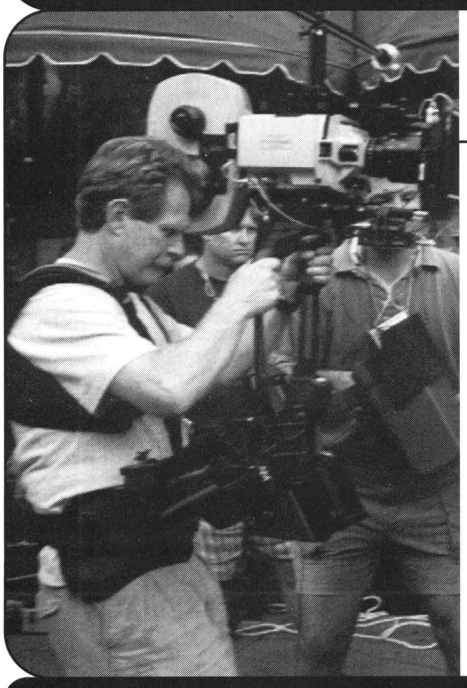

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placebos — current off-the-shelf stocks. We performed blind tests under Kodak's supervision, with Primos that Panavision was nice enough to let us use. The Kodak reps then hand-carried the film over to CFI and waited by the machines until all of the film came out, so no chips would be left behind. We scanned the negative and were able to very quickly identify the placebos by the grain patterns. However, among the newer stocks, there was one that really stood out. We just didn't seeing the reddish fringing near the highlights anymore."

Following the successful test, Kodak fashioned a new emulsion which is essentially very close to their 200 ASA EXR 5293 stock. "It may just be souped-up 93," opines Yeatman. According to John C. Brewer, a research scientist for Kodak's PMI Division, the stock is close enough in its tonal qualities to be referred to as a "93 derivative," though its official name is SFX 200T.

Kodak generated 500,000' of the SFX 200T, half of which was set aside for Dream Quest to use on *Mighty Joe Young*. "We shot 200,000 feet of it, all in VistaVision with Leica still lenses, with excellent results," says Yeatman.

Although Kodak would not reveal the technical details involved in their successful elimination of the fringing problem, Yeatman believes that there must have been some type of alteration performed on the SFX 200T's anti-halation backing. He explicates, "The cyan layer is the closest to the substrate, so the small amount of light that is able to reach through to the anti-halation layer may have been reflecting back through the substrate to the nearby cyan layer. Also, the three separate color layers expand and contract minutely in processing as the density shifts. I think they did something to limit those discrepancies between the three layers.

Interestingly, however, SFX 200T is also beginning to find favor outside of the effects realm. "A side benefit of the changes made to produce the new film is an increased in overall clarity, especially in the low frequencies," notes Brewer. "This benefit is leading some filmmakers to use the stock for straight photographic work, with very favorable results." ■

Books in Review

by George Turner

Contemporary Cinematographers on Their Art
by Pauline Rogers
Focal Press, 224 pps.
paper, $19.95

It's always a pleasure to read interviews with a working cinematographer. In this neat package by Pauline Rogers — *International Photographer*'s "On the Set" columnist — some of the top talents in camerawork tell it like it is. Each chapter contains a lot of information, not only about using the tools of the craft, but also about the relationships between members of the production team, set protocol, political pressures, preplanning, postproduction, the integration of visual effects, and other challenges that are part and parcel of the cinematographer's job.

Several different cinematography venues are spotlighted: large and small features, multiple-camera sitcoms (both film and tape), soap operas, commercials, videos, second-unit aerial photography, and modern visual effects. The reader is given an overall view of these fields, as well as information about how each has evolved.

The interviewees include ASC members Thomas Ackerman, John Bartley, Donald Burgess, Dean Cundey, Roger Deakins, Stephen Goldblatt, Emmanuel Lubezki, Donald M. Morgan, and Dennis Muren; plus sitcom specialist Donald A. Morgan, aerial cameraman David Nowell, and commercial/video cameraman Salvatore Totino. (Note: Doug Trumble is really Doug Trumbull.)

The artistic philosophies of the cinematographers are well-presented, and the questions posed are clear and down-to-earth. For example, Muren discusses an "impossible" shot George Lucas wanted for *The Empire Strikes Back:* "At the beginning of the film, a helicopter [POV] flies over the planet [Hoth, which was shot in Norway]. You see a tauntaun [mounted ice creature] running off into the distance. The camera moves up, flies over him, then looks straight down... It was a process of dissecting the equipment and seeing what it could do... We then had to figure out how [the various] elements would work together. If what we tried didn't work, we would then try something else. Most everything is solvable." Muren then proceeds to explain exactly what was done. Such is the caliber of this study's informative responses.

Dwight Frye's Last Laugh
by Gregory William Mank,
James T. Coughlin,
Dwight D. Frye
Midnight Marquee,
320 pps., paper, $20

Anyone who has ever seen or heard Dwight Frye in a film is left with an indelible impression of a marvelous character actor, yet his name remains relatively obscure. His story is tragic: Frye had a brilliant stage career playing an astonishing variety of roles in both comedy and drama, then entered the movies to repeat one of his more triumphant roles only — to be typecast for the rest of his career.

Frye's performances in the stage and screen productions of *Dracula,* as the insectivorous Renfield, created a sensation. Portraying the vampire's mentally impaired slave, Frye slithered through the fantastic yarn with a hissing voice and the most chilling laughter ever heard anywhere. Not until Richard Widmark's debut in *Kiss of Death* some three decades later did filmgoers hear a maniacal laugh comparable in its ability to elicit goosebumps. During that same

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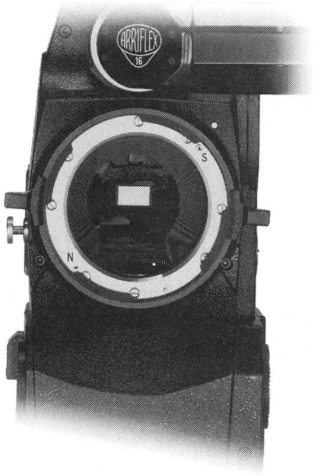

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year — 1931 — Frye also embodied the snarling murderer trapped by Charlie Chan in *The Black Camel,* the surly and quavery-voiced "gunsel," Wilmer, in *The Maltese Falcon* (the role played in the 1941 remake by Elisha Cook, Jr.), and the half-witted hunchback Fritz in *Frankenstein.*

More ghoulish characters followed in the mystery and horror films that proliferated during the Thirties, but within a few years Frye's screen roles became fewer and smaller. That an actor with such a well-known face and voice would be reduced to appearing only in minor roles — sometimes even without screen billing — was truly a fate of bitter irony. In his final years, Frye worked nights in an aircraft factory and answered casting calls by day.

It's a delight to find a book affectionately devoted to the life of a man who has become a cult figure (though much too late for him to enjoy it), but about whom next to nothing has been previously written. Hovering over Frye's biography is the lamentable irony that the actor became appreciated posthumously due to the very roles that caused his downfall. During the lean years of playing hotel clerks and hairdressers, Frye would have no doubt been astonished by the fact that in 1996 his last-name-only autograph on an envelope was sold at auction for $1,855!

The book includes extensive appendices of Frye's films, early stage appearances, Broadway plays, and work in regional and stock company productions, along with a multitude of rare photos.

Making Videos for Money
by Barry Hampe
Henry Holt & Co., 352 pps., paper, $17.95

Barry Hampe, a veteran maker of all types of commercial films and videos, recently wrote the highly recommended *Making Documentary Films and Reality Videos.* His new opus, *Making Videos for Money,* is written in the same witty, common-sense style and is just as praiseworthy. This time around, the emphasis is less on technology and more on other elements necessary for lucrative, marketable videomaking. Much of it concerns the minefield of dealing with clients, replete with past reports from the frontlines which are informative, amusing and/or painful.

One small section that this reader applauds regards "chasing fads" in making commercials: "Doing what others are doing, rather than what the video's communication needs require." Such trends includes intercutting black-and-white and color footage, the faux documentary style (using black-and-white, shaky camerawork, or out-of-focus shots for "realism"); and slow-motion shots for no apparent reason. Some recent cuties could be also be added: words that float apart as you're trying to read them; anamorphic shots set cockeyed to stretch pictures diagonally; inserting little white flashes here and there; and step-printing action, among countless others.

The field comprising information videos, commercials and infomercials is booming, and anyone entering into this area can benefit from what Hampe has to say.

BFI Modern Classics:
The Terminator
by Sean French
British Film Institute/
Indiana University Press
72 pps., paper, $9.95

This study of the famed 1984 science-fiction yarn heralds a new series produced in the same format as the BFI Film Classics, but dealing with more recent productions. *The Terminator* enjoyed well-deserved popularity and did wonders for the careers of director James Cameron and star Arnold Schwarzenegger. French describes the making of the film, including photography and visual effects; assesses it in terms of artistry and audience appeal; and notes its influence on later films. He opines that it has more charm than Cameron's later, more expensive films, including the much larger sequel. This little book is a neatly conceived bundle and a harbinger of good things to come. ■

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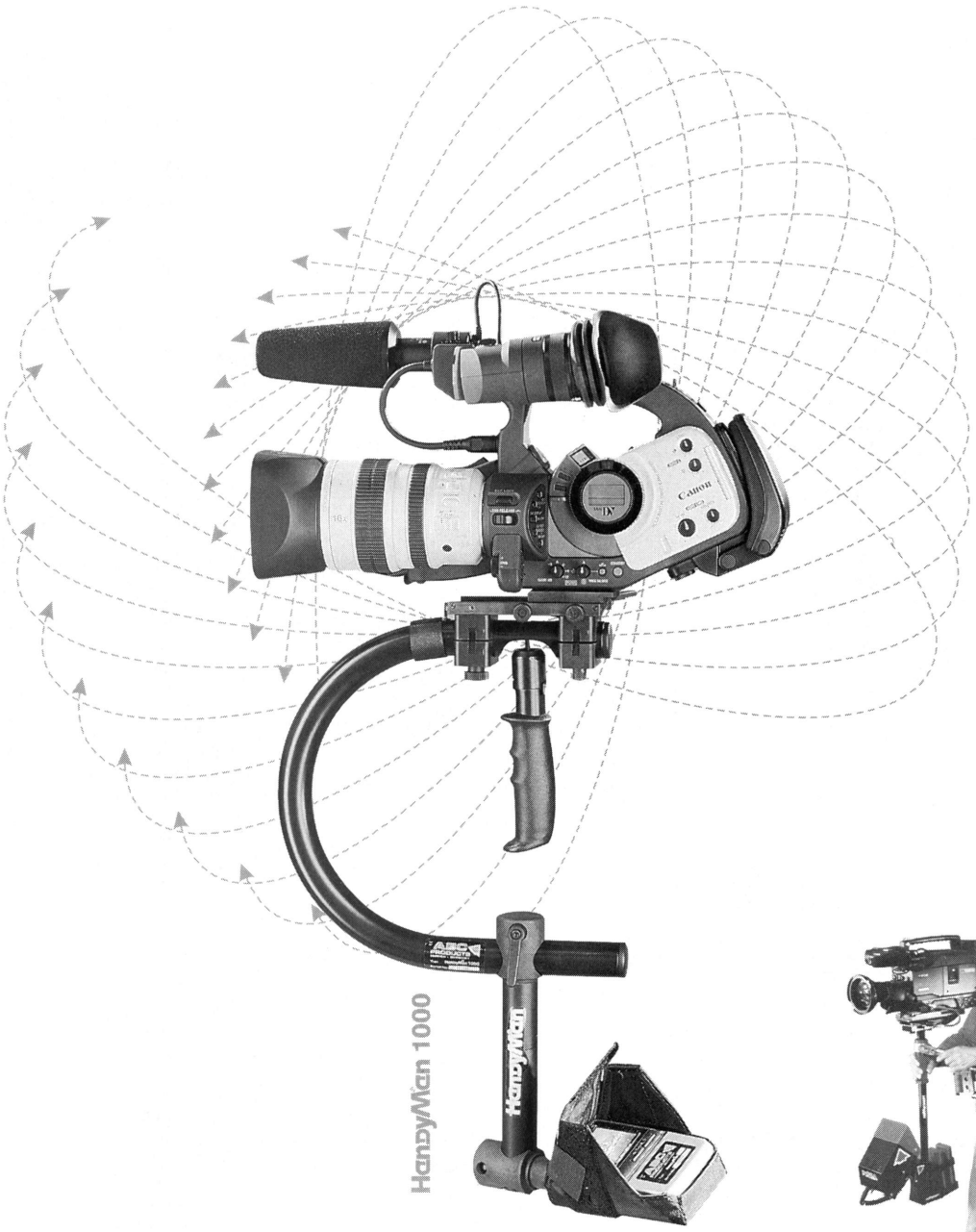

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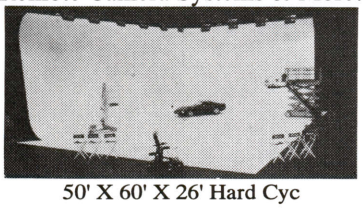

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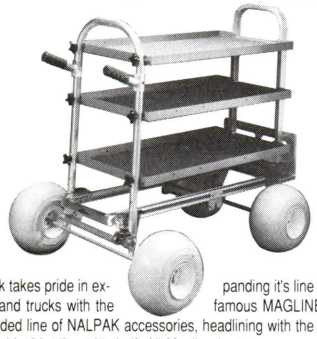

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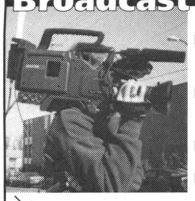

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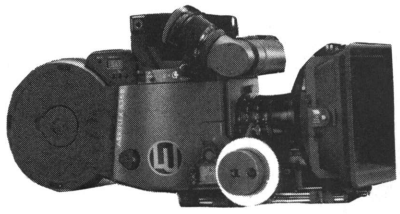

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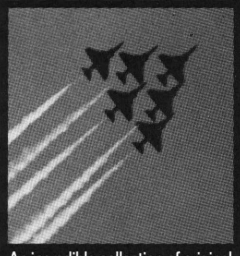

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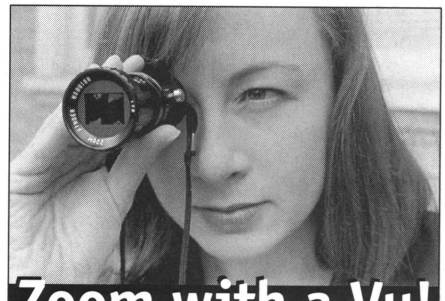

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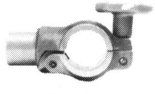

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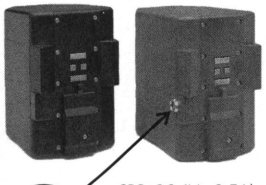

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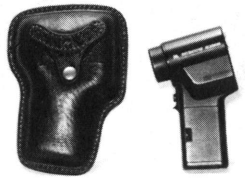

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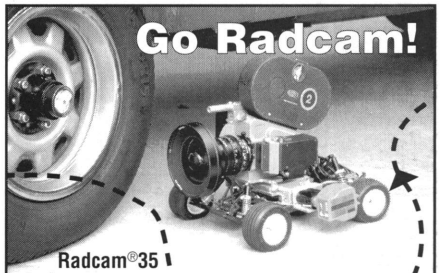

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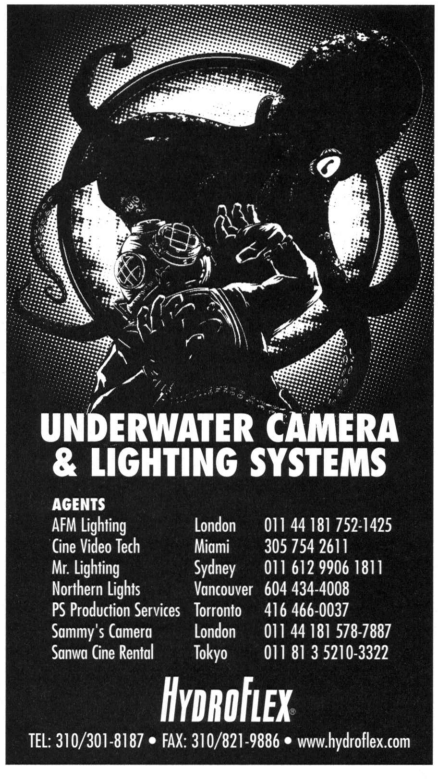
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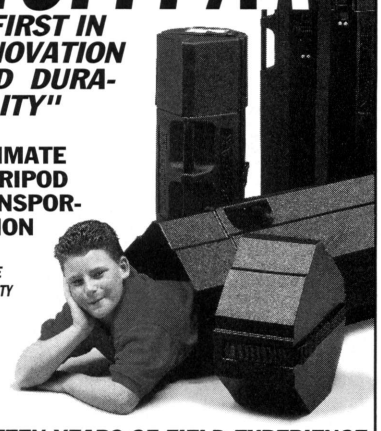
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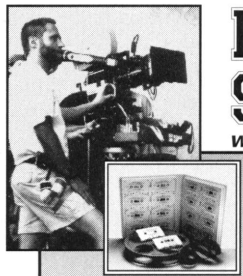
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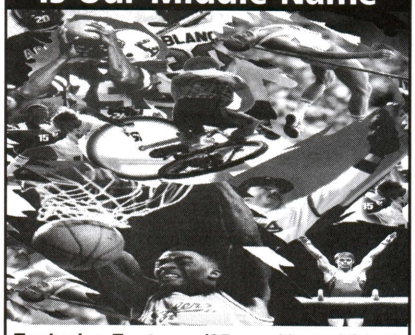

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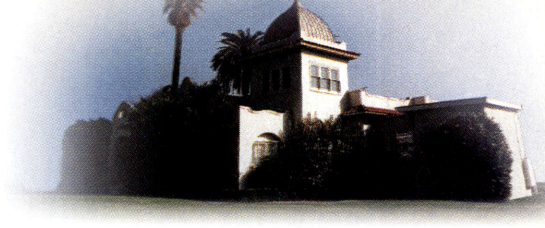
From the Clubhouse



ASC Inducts Feil

The latest member of the American Society of Cinematographers is New York native **Gerald Feil.** He earned a B.A. in Theater Arts from Antioch College, where he and another student founded, constructed and programmed the campus radio station, which has since become an NPR affiliate. As a student, he served as lighting designer for four summer seasons of the Antioch Shakespeare Festival and for the Cincinnatti Symphony Orchestra.

Feil became a principal stringer for an NBC-TV regional station (WLWD, Dayton) after the station carried his filmed coverage of a devastating tornado. After college, he returned to New York, where he designed the lighting for several Broadway musical and dramatic productions until being drafted into the military. Assigned to the Army Pictorial Service studio, he worked as an "apprentice" on large-scale Hollywood-like studio productions and complex shoots in distant locations. Following the war, Feil joined the new "cinema verité" group which had been formed by Richard Drew, Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker and Albert and David Maysles. As technical director for *Filmmakers*, Feil collaborated with Leacock and Pennebaker on the design of a radical new technology; this resulted in lightweight autonomous self-contained camera systems which incorporated wireless sync, ergonomic handheld design and high-quality zoom optics.

Feil's big break as cinematographer came with Peter Brook's adaptation of *Lord of the Flies* (1963). Subsequent projects included *He Knows You're Alone*, *Savage Dawn*, *Silent Madness* and the Rolling Stones concert film *Let's Spend the Night Together*, as well as *Friday the 13th III* in 3-D, for which Feil helped refine the "Arrivision" 3-D camera system and aided in designing specialized lighting and framing techniques. Since 1993, he has been a faculty member of New York University's Film Department; Feil received the Excellence in Teaching Award in 1994 and the Distinguished Service Award in 1996.

New ASC Associates

Ronald D. Burdett is the founder, president and CEO of Sunset Post, one of the leading postproduction studios serving the Hollywood community. He is an honors graduate in engineering with postgraduate studies in mathematics and computer science. In 1980, he began Sunset Post in Glendale, California, with 1,000 square feet of space and one worker; the company now owns the 25,000-square-foot premises and employs more than 100 highly-skilled, creative and technical professionals, as well as a pool of independent contractors. In order to meet its commitment to the major studios, Sunset's virtually all-digital facility operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

As immediate past president/CEO of the International Teleproduction Society (ITS), Burdett originated the ITS Outreach Program, developing an unprecedented alliance with SMPTE that gave the ITS and the teleproduction and postproduction industry a strong voice in the industry's standards-setting procedure. Early in 1997, the Montreaux International Television Symposium in Switzerland asked Burdett to spearhead a blue-ribbon panel of industry experts — marking the first time that the postproduction industry has been invited to participate.

Steven A. Blakely is vice president of film operations at DuArt Film and Video and has some 24 years of experience in the motion picture industry. He began his career in the early Seventies at the Stockdale Corporation in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he was trained in all aspects of motion picture laboratory operations. In 1980, Blakely was brought on as laboratory supervisor at the New York-based DuArt Film and Video, and over the years worked with laboratory procedures such as control, printing, timing and developing. He later assumed a managerial position at DuArt's 35mm film dailies operation. He currently serves as manager for answer printing of feature film work, as well as vice president of the laboratory's film operations.

DemoGraFX high-resolution imaging technologist **Gary Demos** attended Cal Tech to study Engineering Applied Science. Prior to founding DemoGraFX in 1988, he worked for Evans & Sutherland, Information International, Inc., and was a founder and chief technical officer of both Digital Productions and Whiteny/Demos Productions. He designed the first digital film printer, helping to launch a new branch of film production technology; he also helped to pioneer the field of computer graphics, and was among the first to achieve near photorealism on motion-picture film. This technology has been used in the creation of advertising, films for theme parks, network logos and special effects for such features as *Futureworld*, *Meteor*, *Looker* and *Tron*. In 1984, Demos received an AMPAS Sci-Tech Award for the "Photorealistic Simulation of Motion Picture Photography by Means of Computer-Generated Images" for his work on *The Last Starfighter* and *2010*. He received another such honor in 1995 for "Pioneering Work in Digital Film Scanning" and a Technical Achievement Award in 1996 for "Pioneering Work in Digital Film Compositing Systems." Demos has received two patents while at DemoGraFX (for an interoperable NDTV format and high-end tape system error correction), and holds two patents in the area of digital signal processing. ■

WRAP SHOT

AC has unearthed many photos that illustrate the problems faced during that thankfully brief period when filmmakers were learning how to deal with the world's eighth wonder: talking pictures. This particular shot, which was sent to us by New York cinematographer Sol Negrin, ASC, presents the story more eloquently than most. The photo was snapped in early 1929 at the Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation's studio in Astoria, Long Island, during the filming of *Gentlemen of the Press,* a so-called "all talking" picture with a Movietone optical soundtrack. The film is a tragic melodrama about a hard-drinking, skirt-chasing newspaperman named Wickland Snell (Walter Huston), his daughter (Betty Lawford), and a scheming "good-time girl" (Kay Francis). Charlie Ruggles and Norman Foster acted in it also. At this time, some of the studios were releasing "part-talking" pictures with dialogue restricted to one or two reels; sound on disc was also still prevalent.

Notice that leading players Huston and Lawford are anchored beneath a microphone suspended above their heads in curious fashion. With this system in place, the actors obviously couldn't stray far from their marks. Though homemade mike booms had been invented by this time, the instruments were not yet in widespread use.

The bane of the cinematographer is in evidence at right — the infamous camera booth, which trade parlance referred to as the "ice box." The harsh irony of this grim-humored misnomer was best demonstrated by the numbers of cameramen felled by the extreme heat and lack of air in these soundproofed torture chambers. The idea, of course, was to keep the considerable noise generated by the era's cameras from resonating to that dangling mike. The booth pictured here was actually roomier than most of its counterparts. Positioned behind the window, wearing suits and ties and trying not to sweat, are director of photography George Folsey, ASC (left) and camera operator Sam Leavitt, ASC. Such situations were common until the development of an astonishing variety of camera-silencing blimps and barneys.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the earliest talkies is the use of *two* directors: one was usually a veteran who knew how a movie should look, but whom the studio bosses didn't trust to handle the film's wordplay; the other was a newcomer whose stage theater experience schooled him in the proper rhythms of discourse. Standing in front of the camera booth is the dialogue director, George Meehan, while Millard Webb, a famed veteran of the silent era, occupies the director's chair. — George Turner

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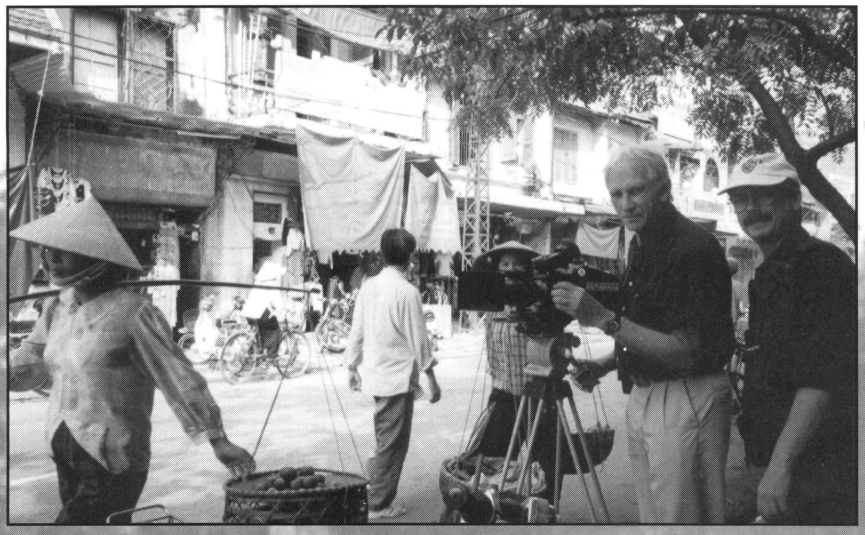
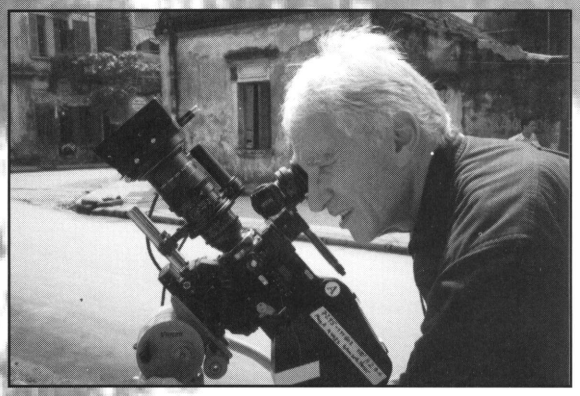
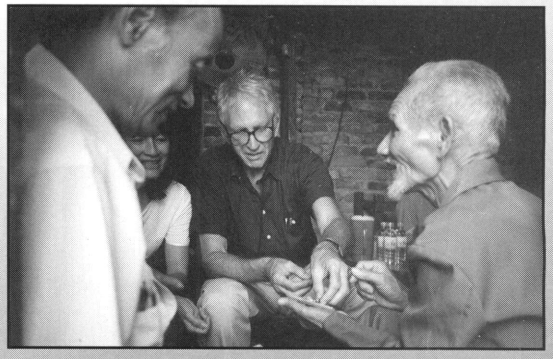


Terry Sanders with camera assistant **Bruce Nolte** in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Two time **Academay Award** winner, **Terry Sanders**, once for **Best Feature Documentary**, once for **Best Live Action Short**, chose **Birns & Sawyer** for his latest project, ***Return with Honor***. This feature length documentary tells the story of U.S Airmen who were held prisoner in North Vietnam, some for as long as eight years. We see the resiliency of the human spirit, as their experiences are retold entirely in their own words.



"We needed to do extensive interviews of ex-POWs, their wives, Vietnamese soldiers and civilians," says Sanders, "so I wanted to use Super-16 and timecode equipment. I knew the place to go would be **Birns & Sawyer** for their **Aaton XTR-Prod cameras**. I have been a long time customer of theirs, and have come to trust their equipment, service, and advice. Their cameras performed flawlessly, and the timecode system allowed for added spontaneity in the interviews."



Producer/Directors Terry Sanders and **Freida Lee Mock** with **Mai Van On**. In 1967, Navy pilot **John McCain** (now a U.S. Senator) was rescued from drowning when his A4E fighter plane crashed and he parachuted into **Truc Bach Lake** in the center of Hanoi.

Birns & Sawyer wishes to congratulate
Terry Sanders and Freida Lee Mock
for their exceptional filmmaking.

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